DARK HORSE COMICS
30 YEARS
3 OF 5
PAUL TOBIN
PIOTR KOWALSKI
THE WITCHER®
CURSE OF CROWS
FROM THE STORY
TEAM THAT BROUGHT YOU
THE WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT!

THE WITCHER®

CURSE OF CROWS

3 OF 5

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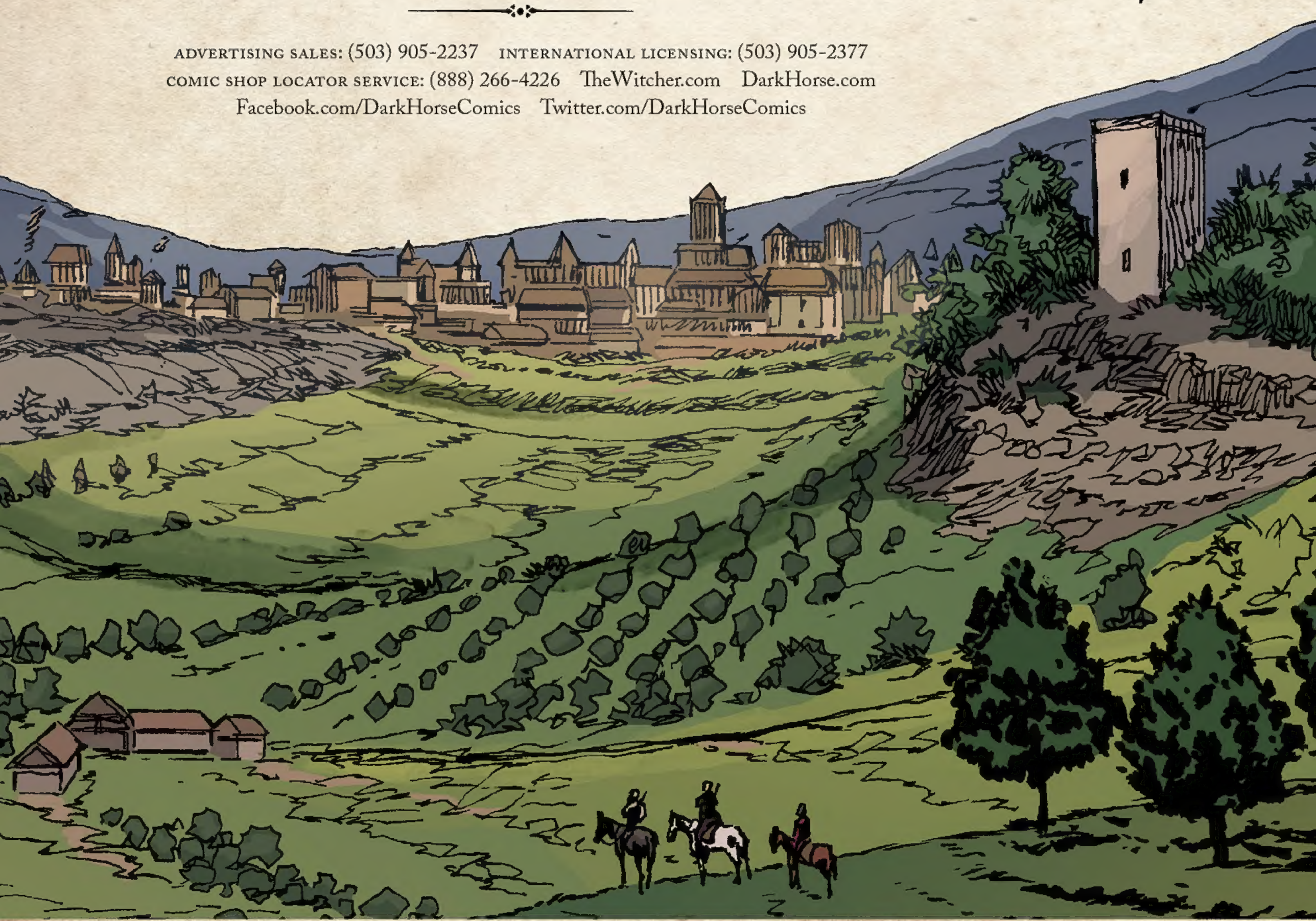

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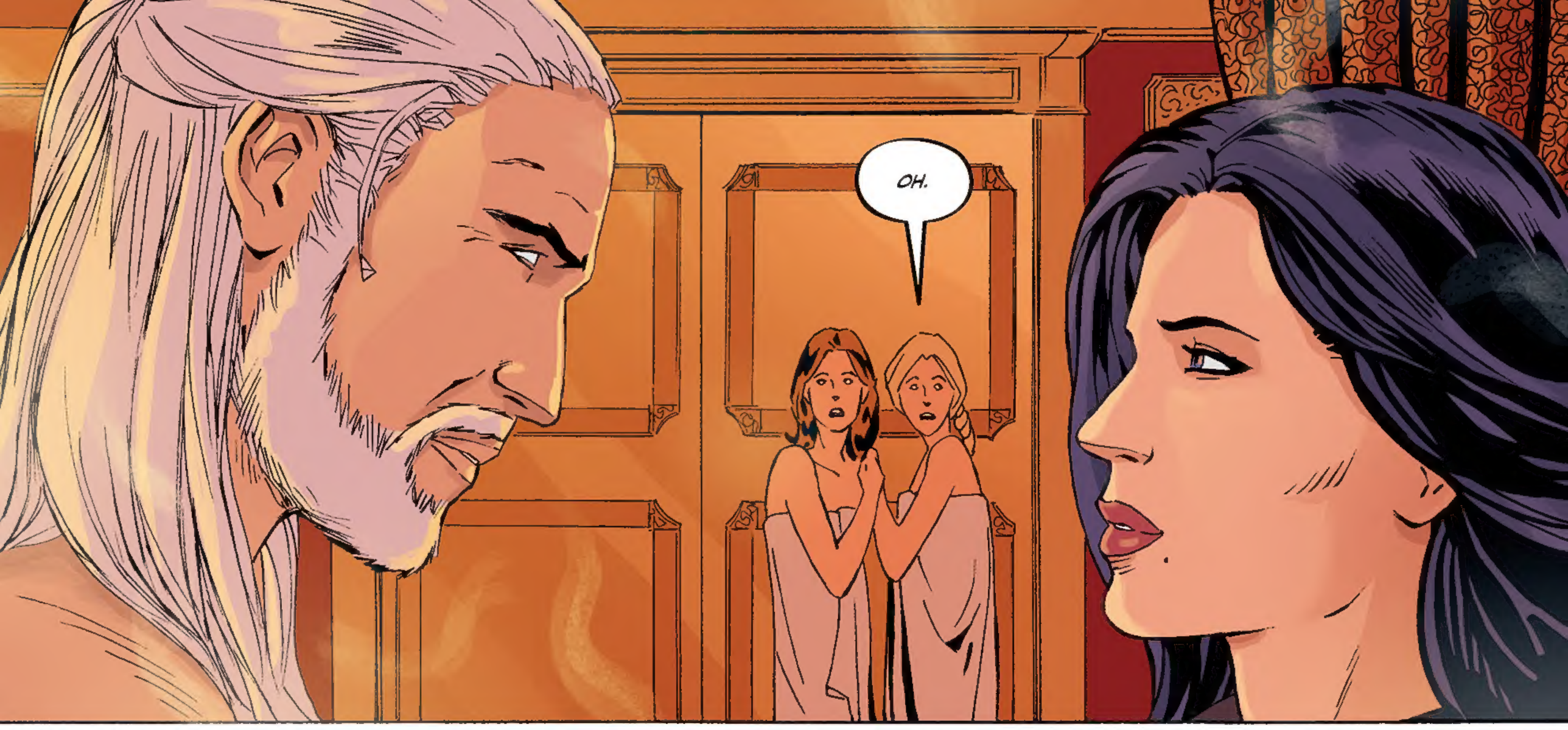
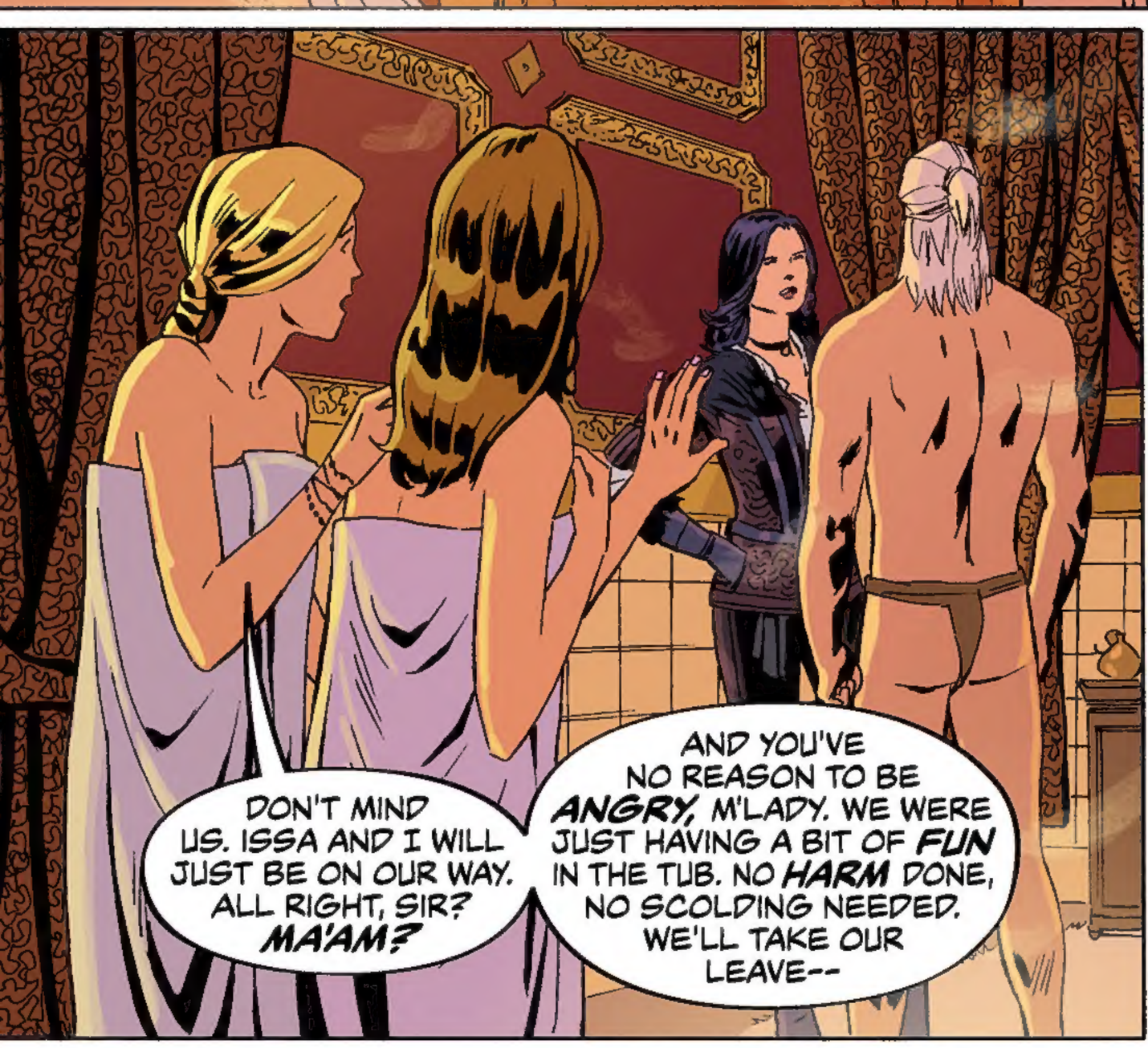
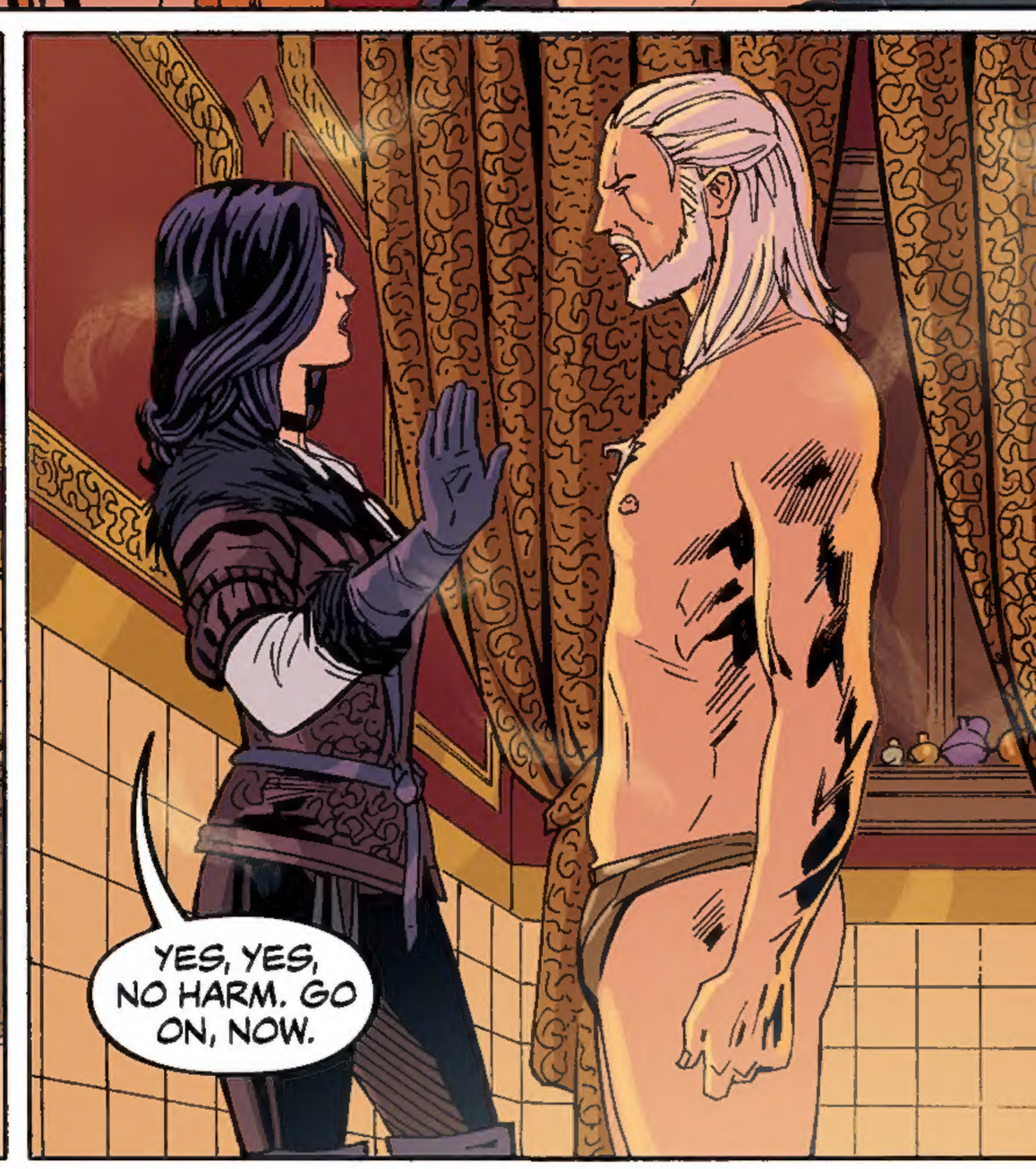
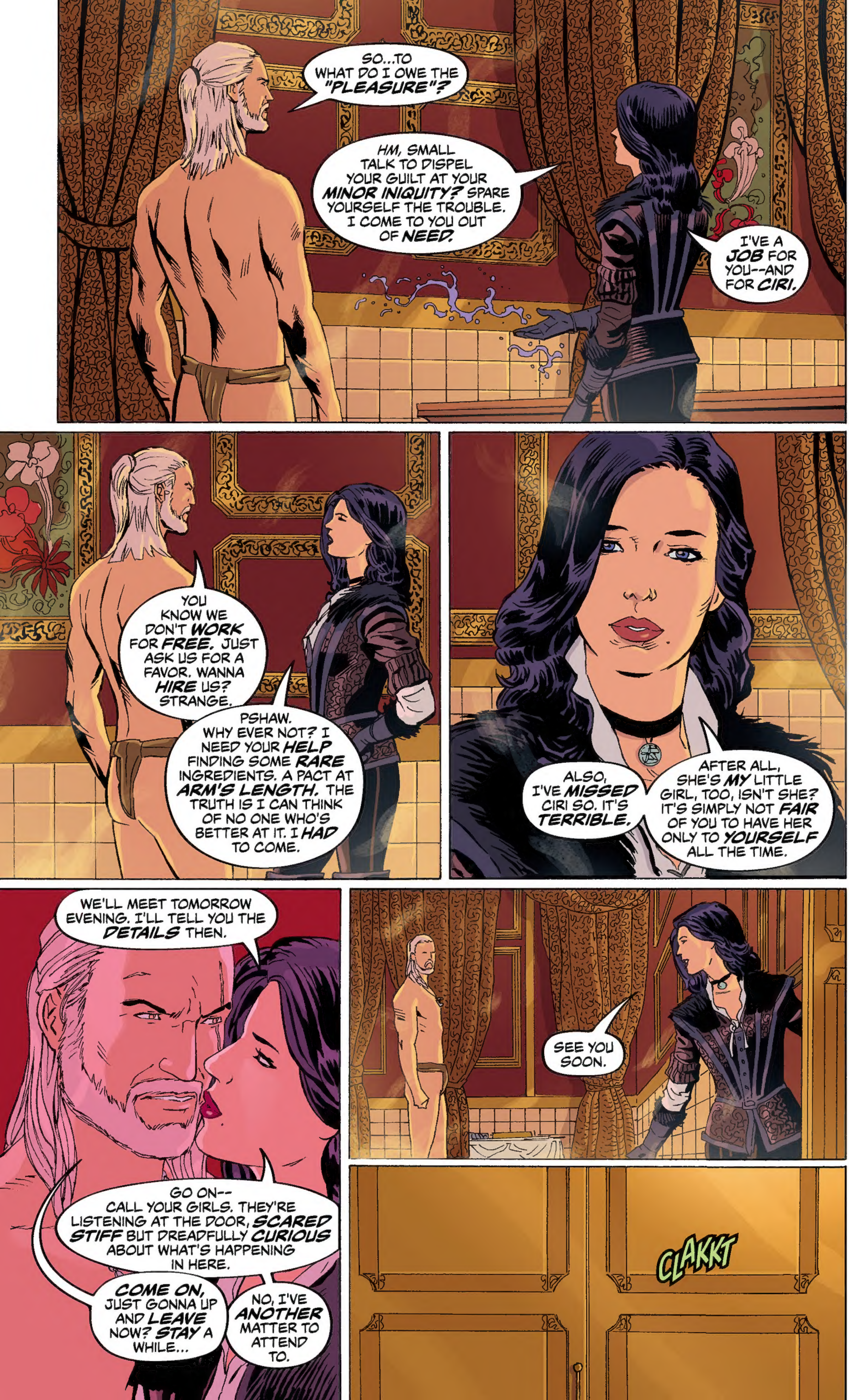

OH.

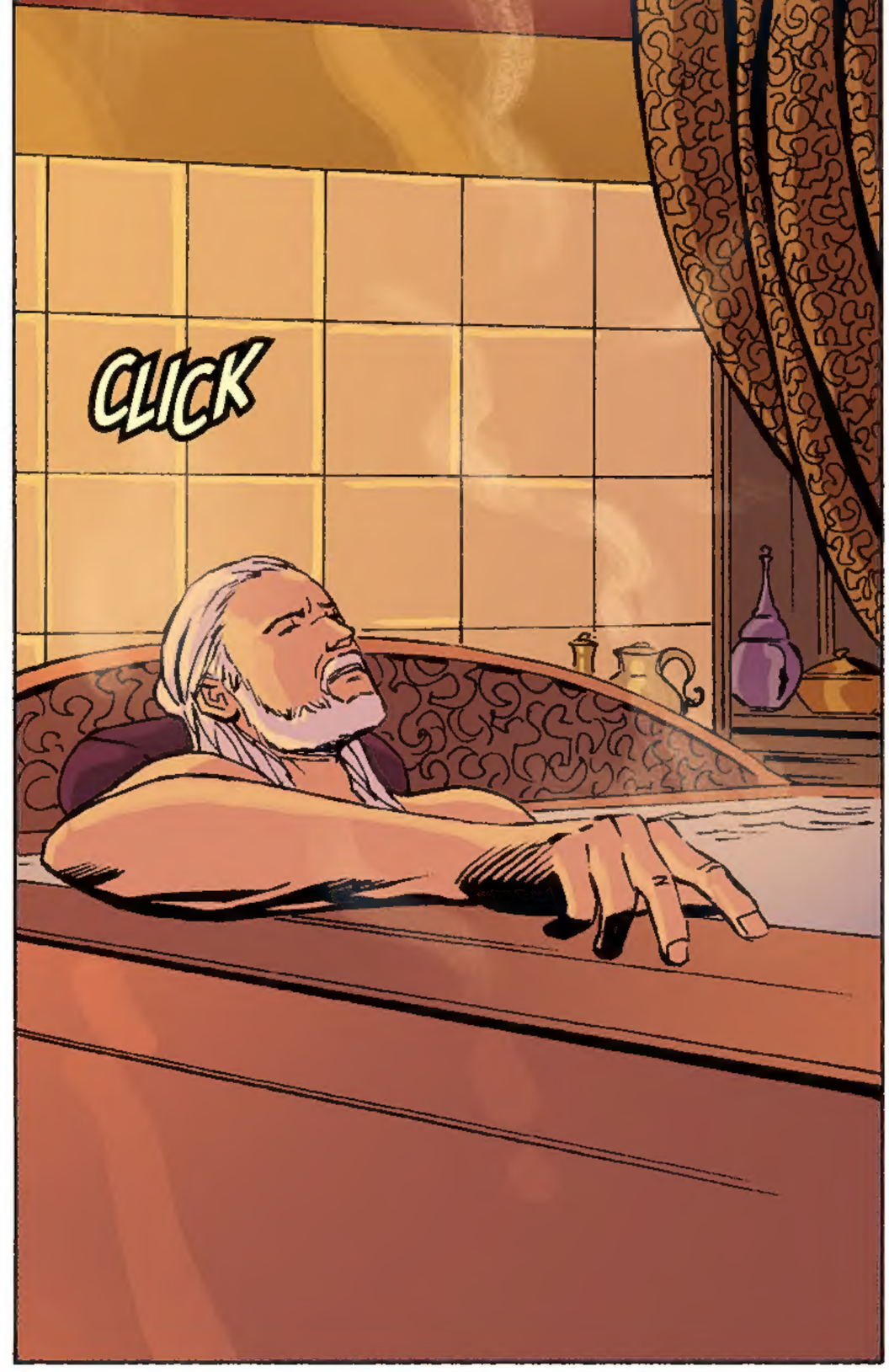

DON'T MIND US. ISSA AND I WILL JUST BE ON OUR WAY. ALL RIGHT, SIR? MA'AM?
AND YOU'VE NO REASON TO BE ANGRY, M'LADY. WE WERE JUST HAVING A BIT OF FUN IN THE TUB. NO HARM DONE, NO SCOLDING NEEDED. WE'LL TAKE OUR LEAVE--


YES, YES, NO HARM. GO ON, NOW.

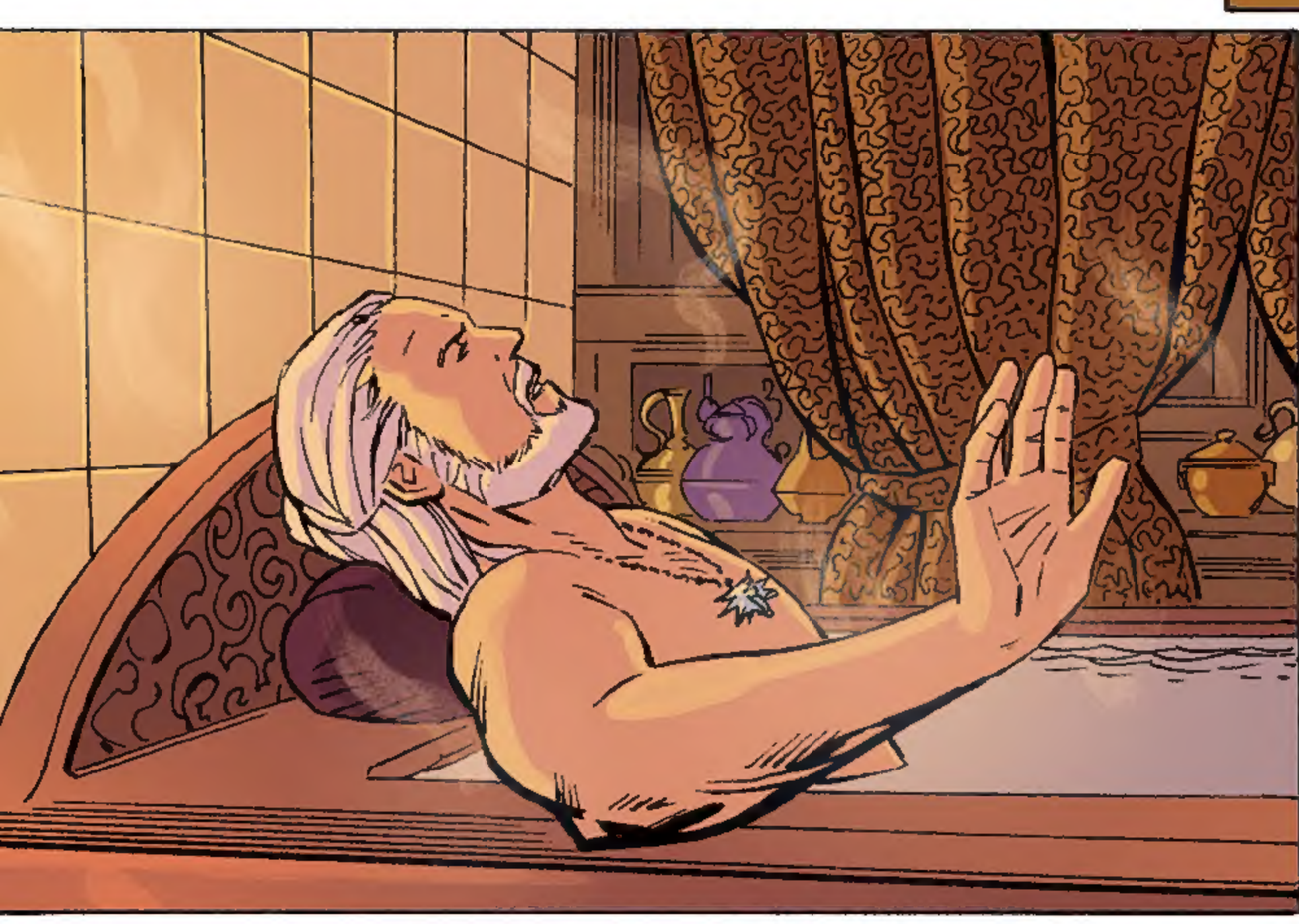
NOT NICE. REALLY SCARED THEM. DIDN'T HAVE TO DO THAT.

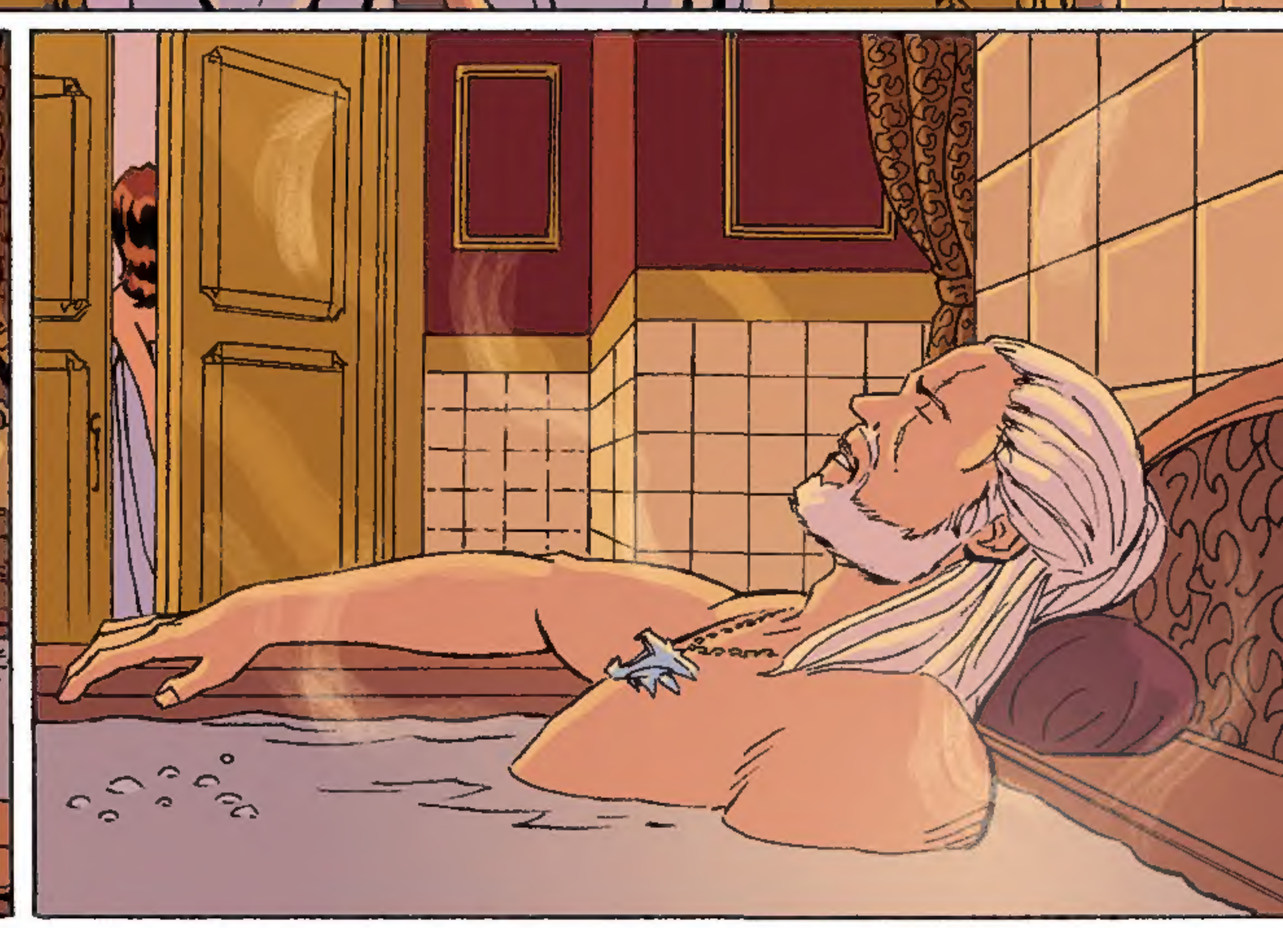
I KNOW. BUT I COULD.

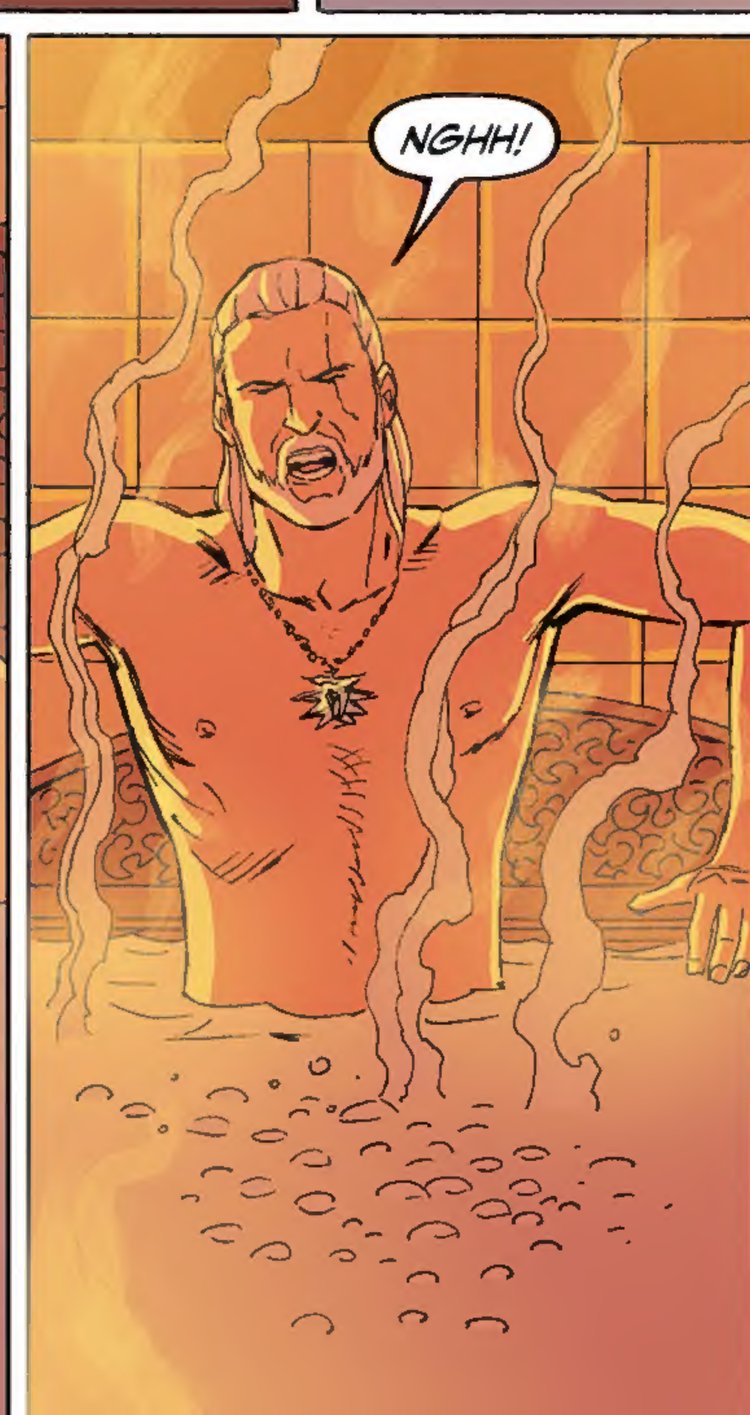

SO...TO WHAT DO I OWE THE "PLEASURE"?
HM, SMALL TALK TO DISPEL YOUR GUILT AT YOUR MINOR INIQUITY? SPARE YOURSELF THE TROUBLE. I COME TO YOU OUT OF NEED.
I'VE A JOB FOR YOU--AND FOR CIRI.
YOU KNOW WE DON'T WORK FOR FREE. JUST ASK US FOR A FAVOR. WANNA HIRE US? STRANGE.
PSHAW. WHY EVER NOT? I NEED YOUR HELP FINDING SOME RARE INGREDIENTS. A PACT AT ARM'S LENGTH. THE TRUTH IS I CAN THINK OF NO ONE WHO'S BETTER AT IT. I HAD TO COME.
ALSO, I'VE MISSED CIRI SO. IT'S TERRIBLE.
AFTER ALL, SHE'S MY LITTLE GIRL, TOO, ISN'T SHE? IT'S SIMPLY NOT FAIR OF YOU TO HAVE HER ONLY TO YOURSELF ALL THE TIME.
WE'LL MEET TOMORROW EVENING. I'LL TELL YOU THE DETAILS THEN.
SEE YOU SOON.
GO ON-- CALL YOUR GIRLS. THEY'RE LISTENING AT THE DOOR, SCARED STIFF BUT DREADFULLY CURIOUS ABOUT WHAT'S HAPPENING IN HERE.
COME ON, JUST GONNA UP AND LEAVE NOW? STAY A WHILE...
NO, I'VE ANOTHER MATTER TO ATTEND TO.
CLAKKT

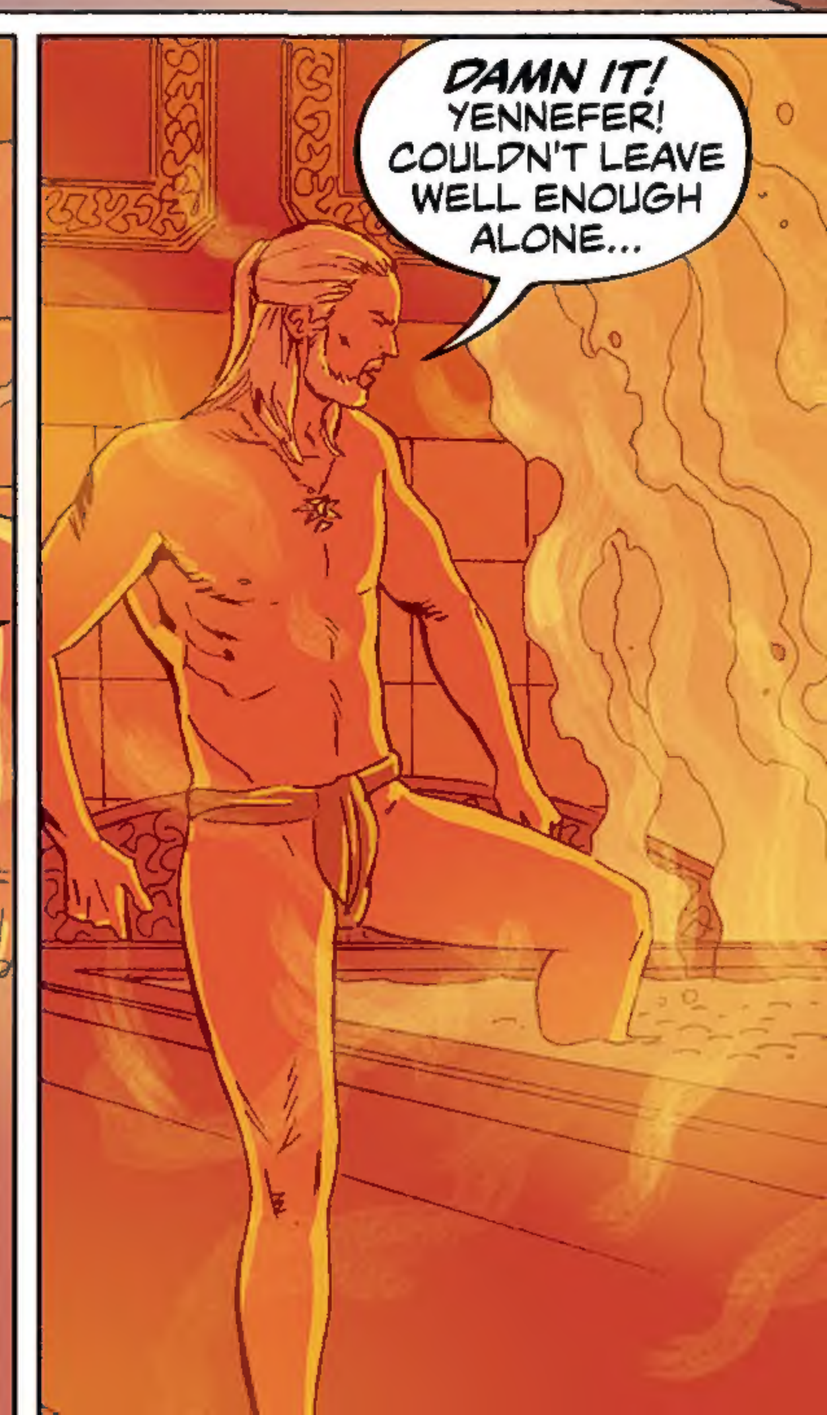

CLICK

CREEEK

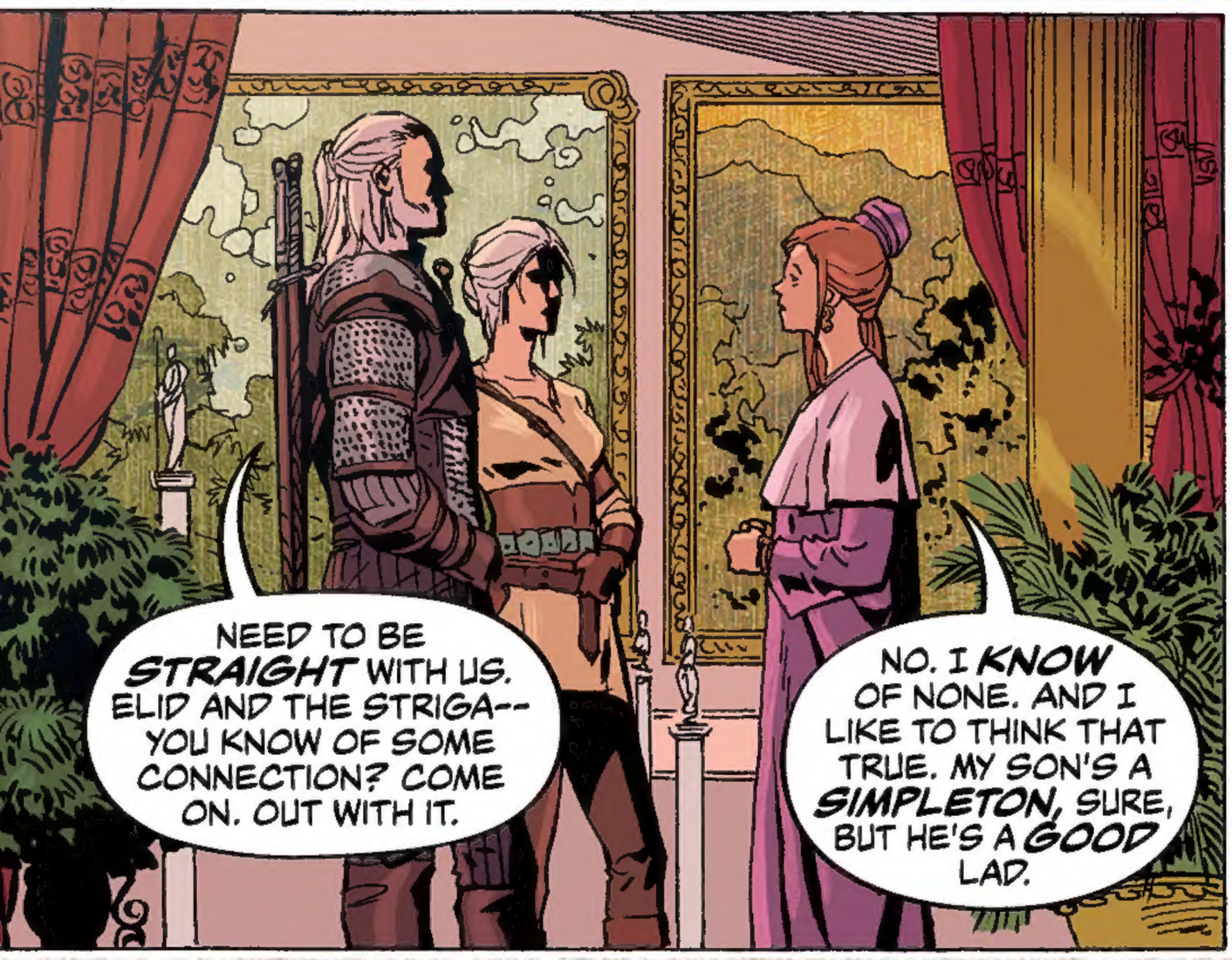


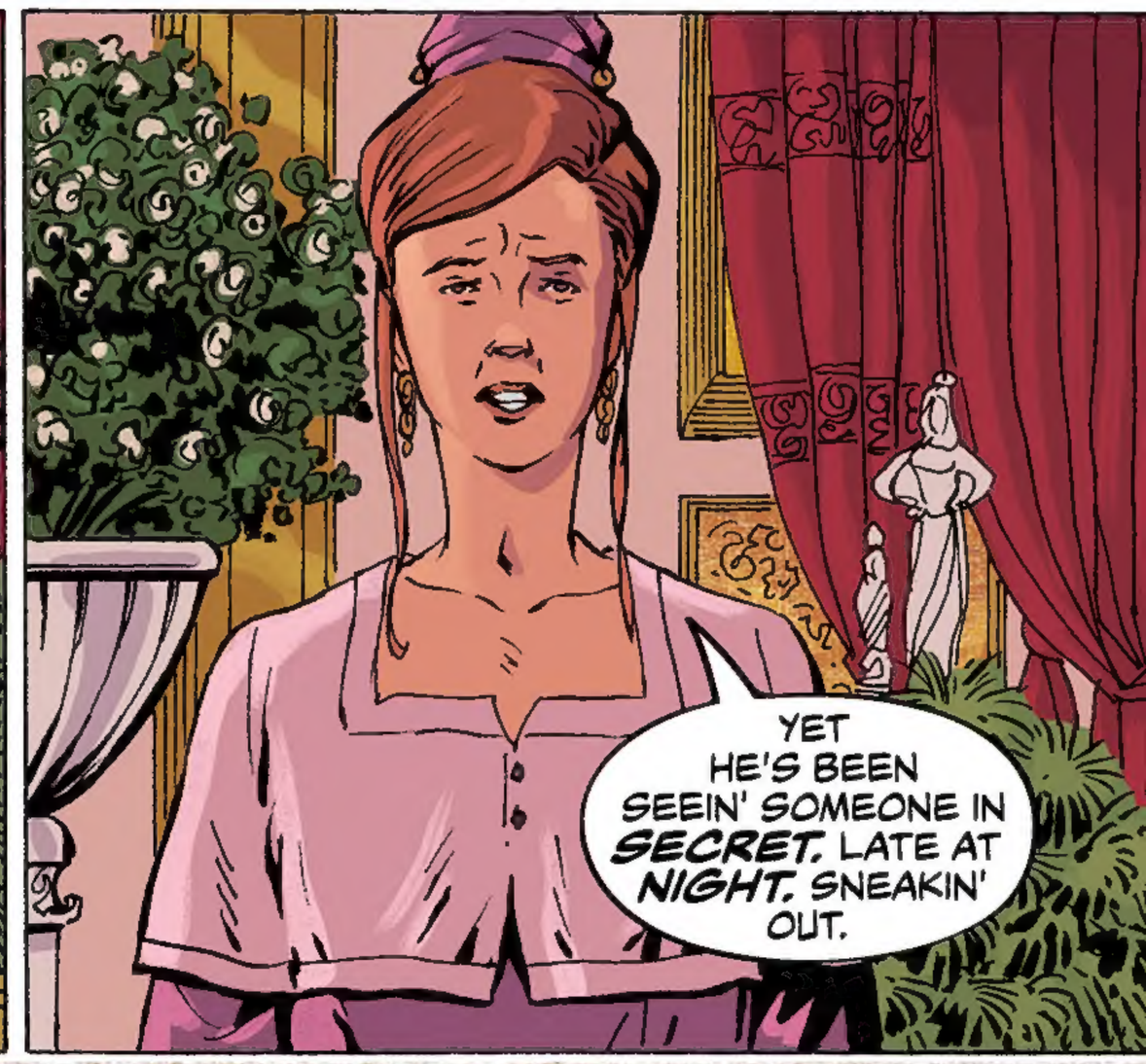



NGHH!


DAMN IT! YENNEFER! COULDN'T LEAVE WELL ENOUGH ALONE...

THE NEXT MORNING.
PRIESTESS MAERLINA'S BATH'OUSE! RID YOURSELVES OF THE CITY'S STENCH, GOOD SIRS!
CLEANSE YOUR BODIES, YOUR SOULS, IN THE COMPANY O' LIKE-MINDED GENTS AND LADIES! THERE AIN'T NO LAW SAYS YOU'VE TO ABIDE AS YOU DO--FILTHY ON THE OUTWITH, LONESOME IN YOUR 'EARTS.
CLANG CLANG
I'LL GIVE YOU A GOOD SCRUB, YER LORDSHIPS!
SOAK YOUR BODIES, DIP YOUR CUP, REST YOUR WOES IN NATURE'S FLOWS. LET HER WARMTH SOOTHE AND SATISFY.

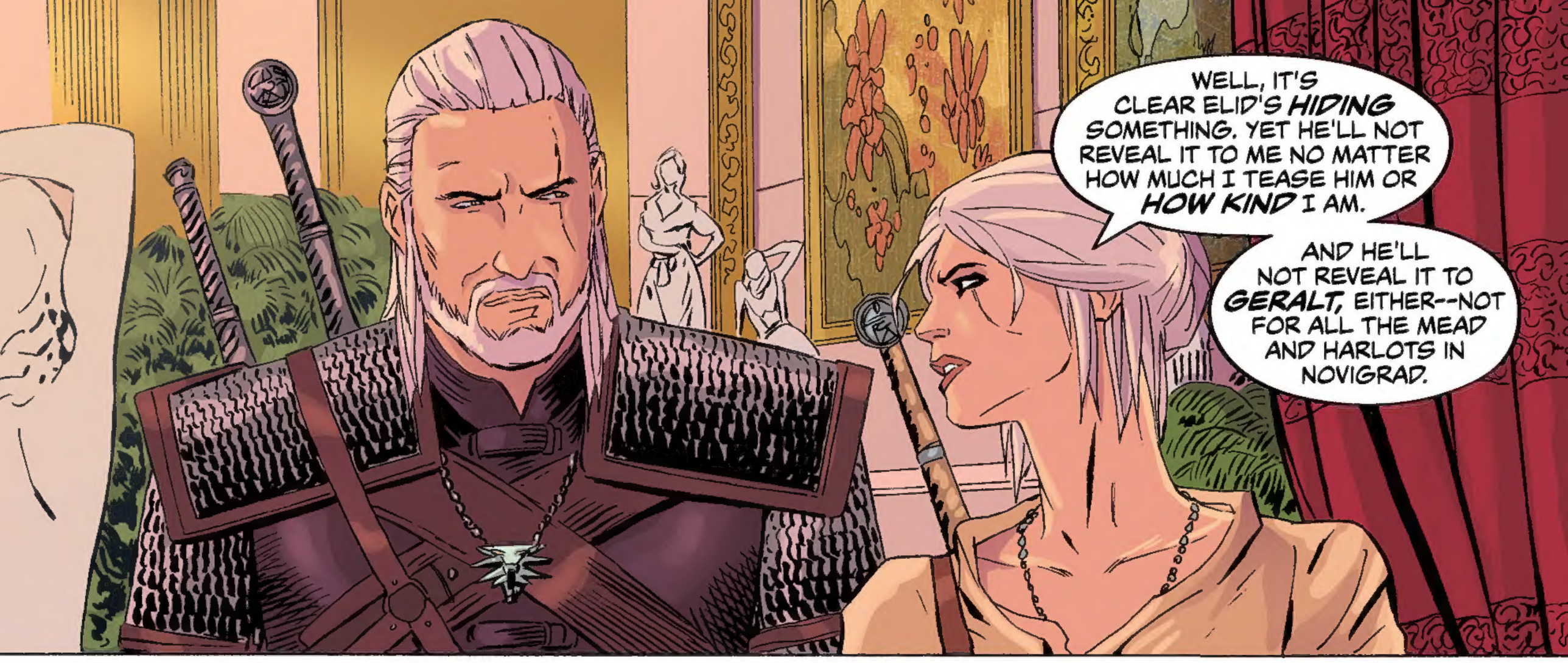

NEED TO BE STRAIGHT WITH US. ELID AND THE STRIGA--YOU KNOW OF SOME CONNECTION? COME ON. OUT WITH IT.
NO. I KNOW OF NONE. AND I LIKE TO THINK THAT TRUE. MY SON'S A SIMPLETON, SURE, BUT HE'S A GOOD LAD.


YET HE'S BEEN SEEIN' SOMEONE IN SECRET. LATE AT NIGHT. SNEAKIN' OUT.

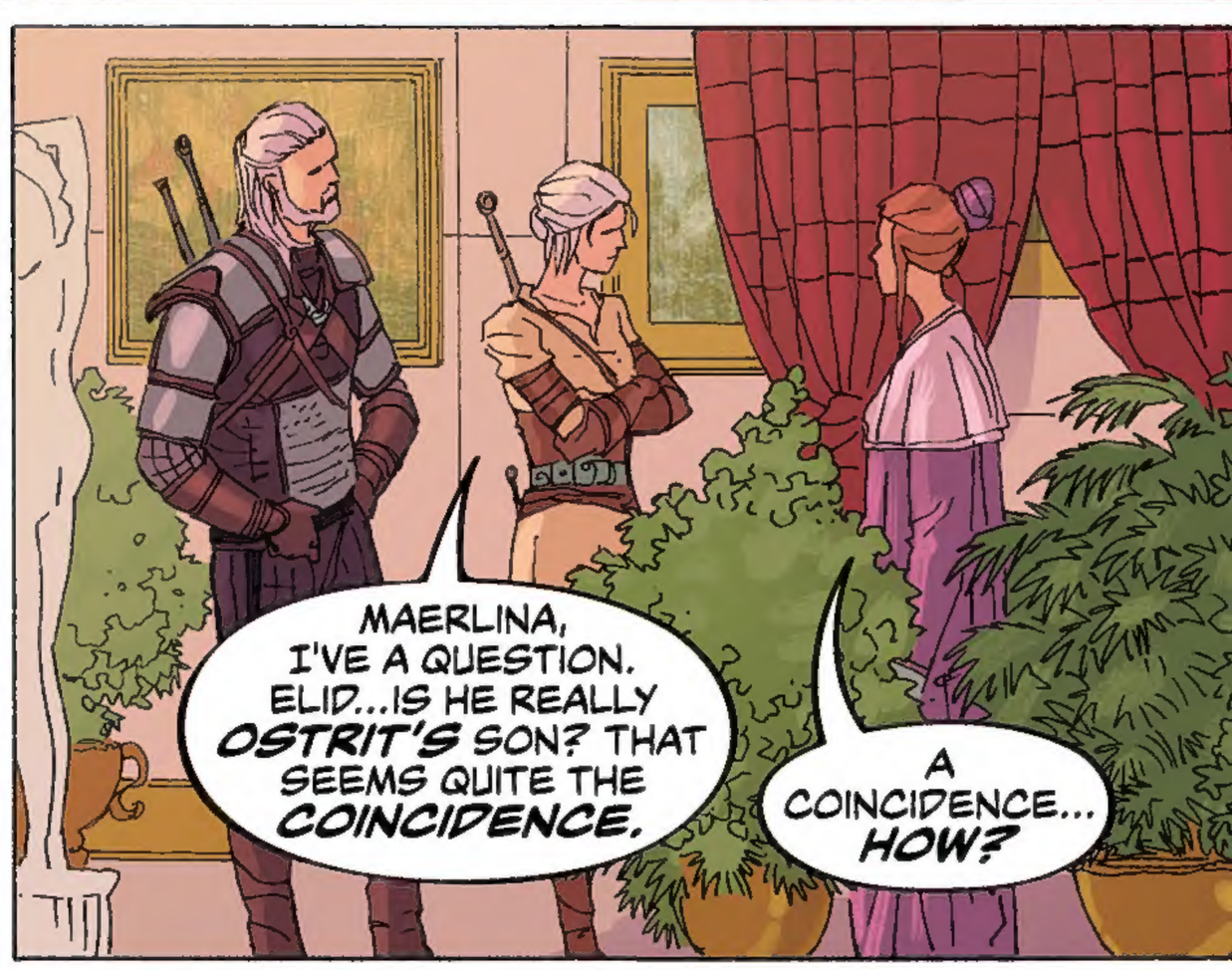
"I'VE FOLLOWED HIM, TRIED TO SPOT WHO HE TALKS TO. BUT I'VE SPOTTED NO ONE. THAT'S TO SAY, HE TALKS TO NOBODY, TO THE SHADOWS, TO THE DARK."

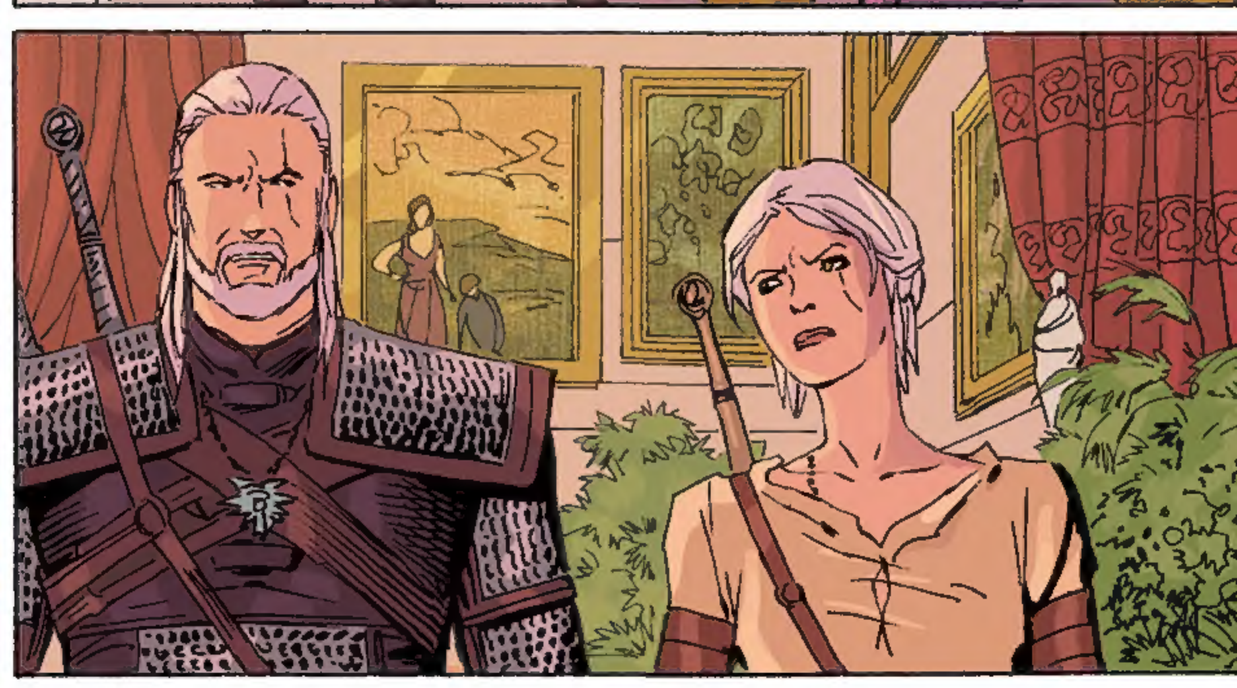
HE TALKS TO HIMSELF. THAT'S...HARDLY SURPRISING.
OH, I'D FAR PREFER TO THINK THAT--JUST ELID BEIN' HIS SIMPLE SELF, A BIT ADDLED. BUT...THOUGH I'VE NO DOUBT THERE WERE NO ONE, I HEARD WHISPERS, A MAN'S WHISPERS.

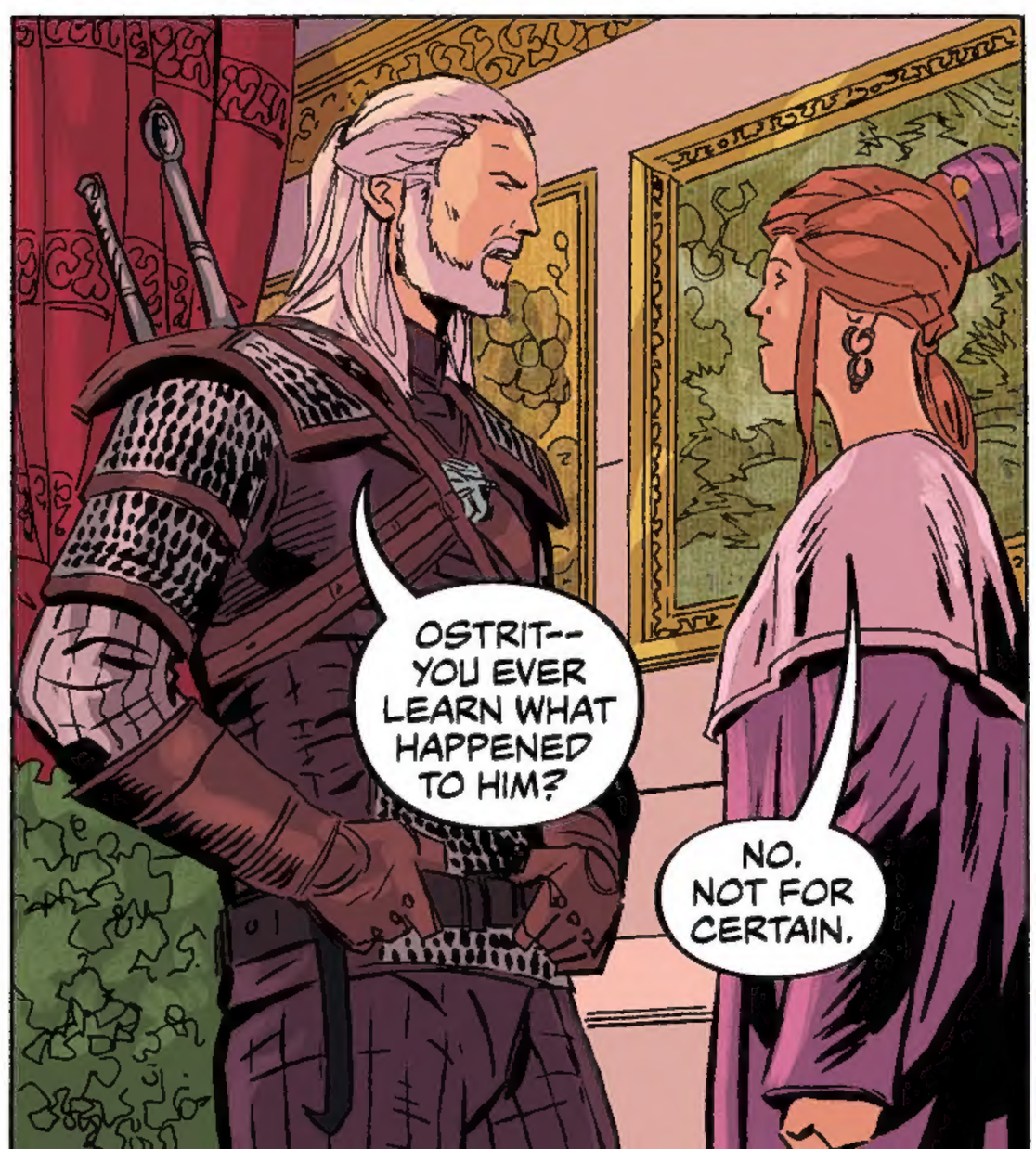
HMMM.


WELL, IT'S CLEAR ELID'S HIDING SOMETHING. YET HE'LL NOT REVEAL IT TO ME NO MATTER HOW MUCH I TEASE HIM OR HOW KIND I AM.
AND HE'LL NOT REVEAL IT TO GERALT, EITHER--NOT FOR ALL THE MEAD AND HARLOTS IN NOVIGRAD.

GOTTA ADMIT, JUST NOT USED TO THIS TYPE OF INVESTIGATING.
NORMALLY, THERE'S A MONSTER TO TRACK, A SCENT TO FOLLOW, SOME UNSAVORY LITTLE RAT WHO KNOWS SOMETHING AND WHO I CAN SQUEEZE--
DON'T YE BE HURTIN' MY SON!
RELAX. DON'T INTEND TO.


MAERLINA, I'VE A QUESTION. ELID...IS HE REALLY OSTRIT'S SON? THAT SEEMS QUITE THE COINCIDENCE.
A COINCIDENCE... HOW?




OSTRIT-- YOU EVER LEARN WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM?
NO. NOT FOR CERTAIN.

THAT'S TO SAY, I KNOWED HIM, WHAT HE WAS CAPABLE OF. I RECKONED HE'D NABBED SOME JEWELS, RAN OFF TO PONT VANIS OR SOME OTHER COURT WHERE HE PRETENDS TO BE MORE IMPORTANT THAN HE IS WHILE DIDDLIN' THE SCULLERY MAIDS.
BUT I'D ALSO HEARD THE STRIGA GOT HIM. CAN'T SAY I KNOW ANYTHIN' FOR THE TRUTH.

STRIGA GOT HIM. SORRY...I GUESS.

"I'D DECIDED TO LIFT THE CURSE. OSTRIT CAME TO ME, CARRYING A HEFTY POUCH. THE STRIGA WAS TO LIVE, FOLTEST'S HELL WAS TO LAST.

"OSTRIT HAD CAST THE CURSE THAT BROUGHT THE CREATURE INTO THE WORLD. OUT OF BITTER JEALOUSY. SEE, HE LOVED QUEEN ADDA, DETESTED HER LOVER, HER BROTHER, THE KING.

"IN THE END, OSTRIT FELL PREY TO THE MONSTER HE'D CREATED."

GUESS I OUGHTA SAY I TRIED TO SAVE HIM...BUT I CAN'T, 'CAUSE I DIDN'T. SAW NO REASON TO.

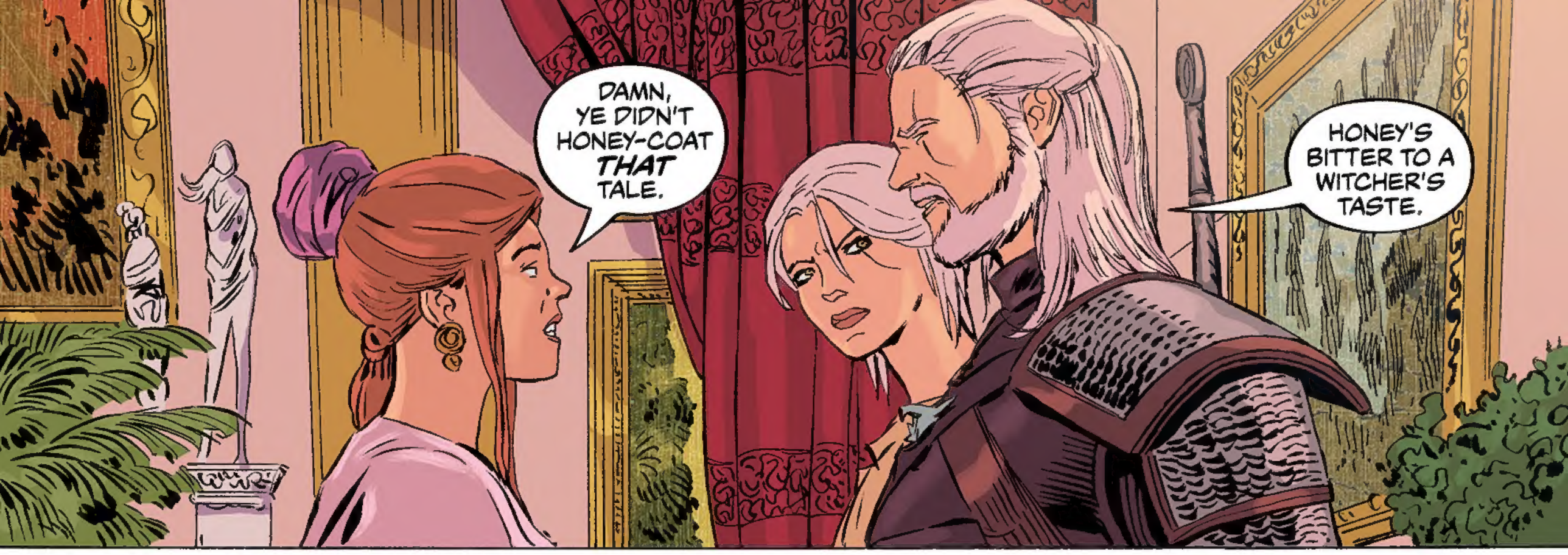
"STRIGA AND I FOUGHT. ONE OF MY ***HARDEST BATTLES*** EVER. NOT UNLIKE FIGHTING A BRICK WALL THAT MOVED FAST, HAD CLAWS AND MORE MUSCLE THAN A BULL.

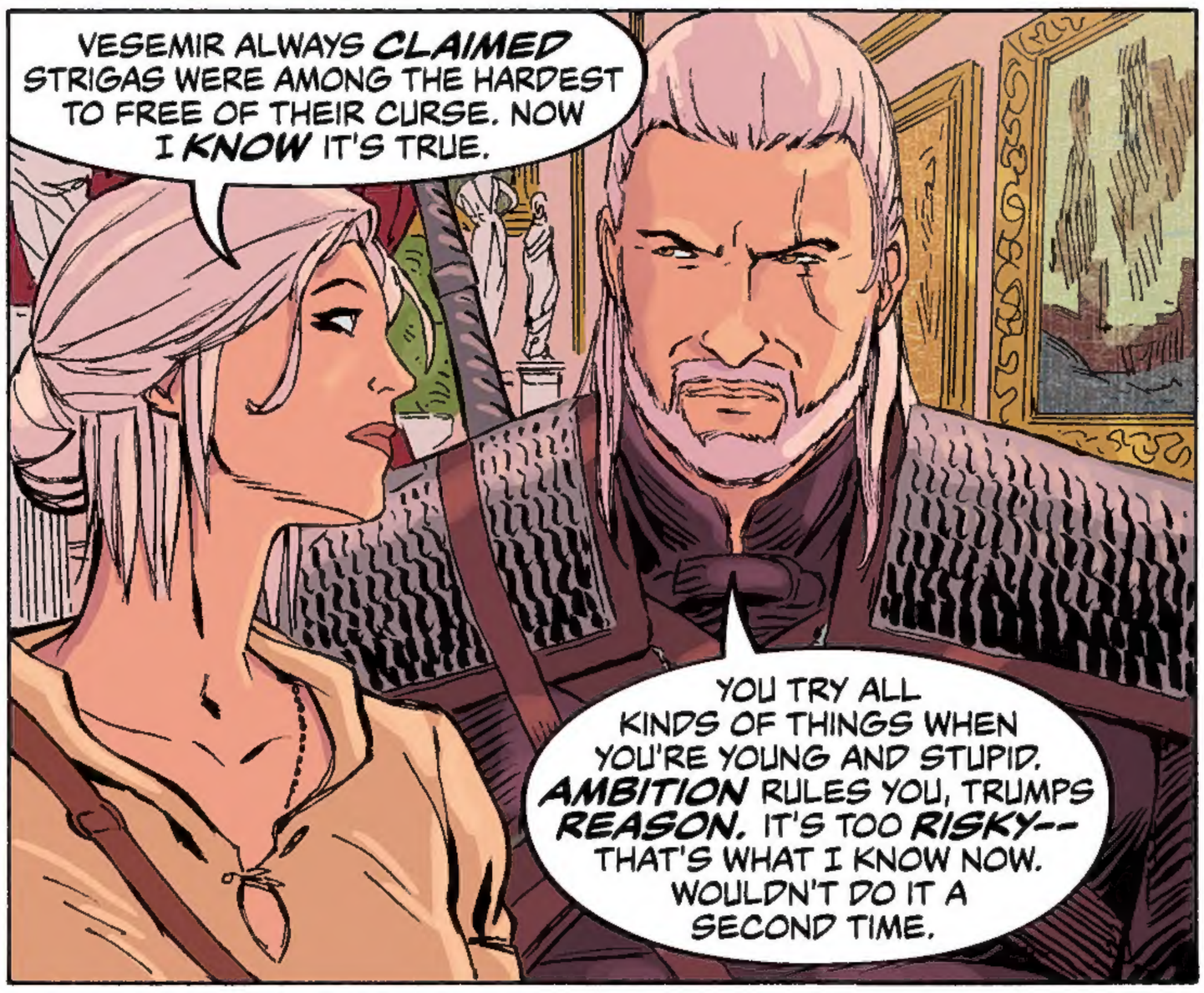
"IT WAS ALL I COULD DO TO ***STAY ALIVE.***

"AND THEN...AS I'D PLANNED...I HID IN THE CREATURE'S SARCOPHAGUS UNTIL ***DAWN,*** TILL THE ***ROOSTER'D*** CROWED THREE TIMES.

"CURSE WAS ***BROKEN,*** CHILD WAS RESTORED TO HER ***TRUE FORM.***

"TOO LATE FOR OSTRIT, THOUGH. HIS CORPSE LAY IN THE YARD. REMAINS WERE EITHER COLLECTED BY FOLTEST'S MEN, ORDERED TO CLEAR AWAY ANY ***EVIDENCE*** OF THE STRIGA, OR BY RATS OUT LOOKING FOR THEIR NEXT ***MEAL.***"

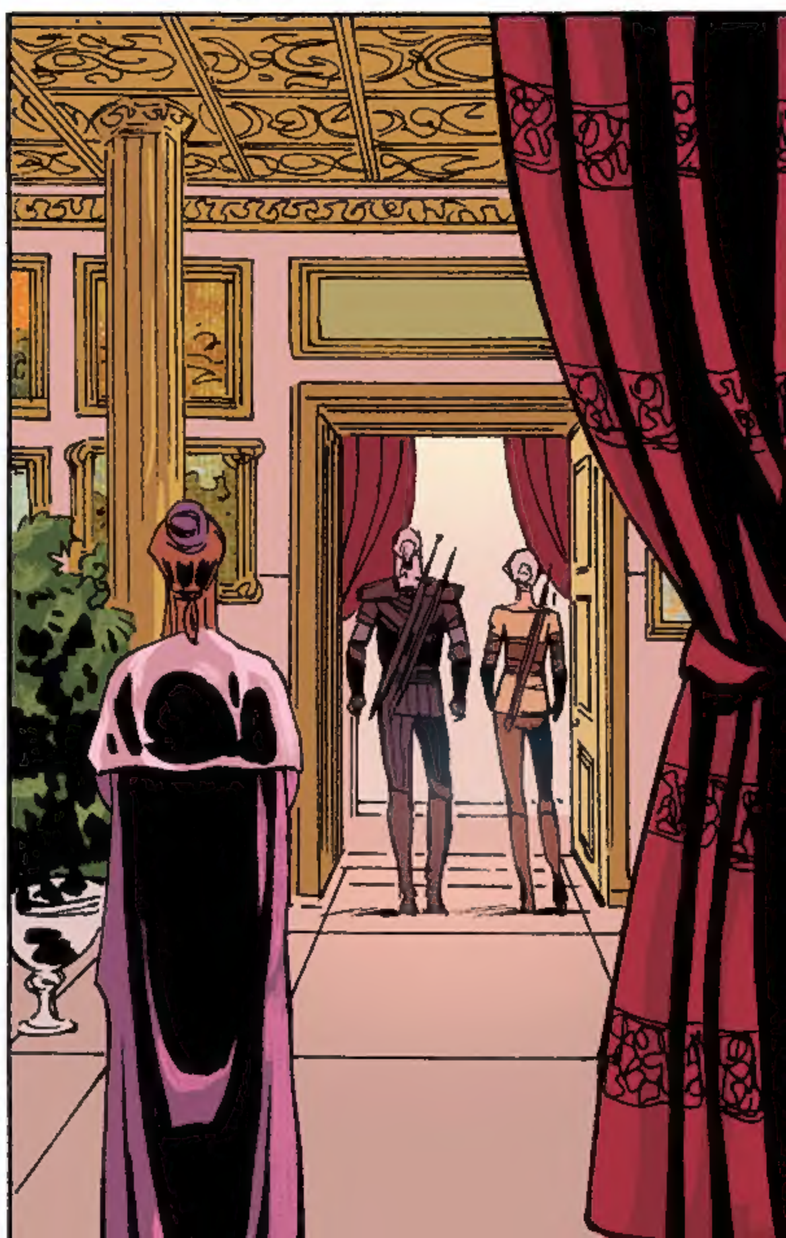

DAMN, YE DIDN'T HONEY-COAT *THAT* TALE.
HONEY'S BITTER TO A WITCHER'S TASTE.


VESEMIR ALWAYS *CLAIMED* STRIGAS WERE AMONG THE HARDEST TO FREE OF THEIR CURSE. NOW I *KNOW* IT'S TRUE.
YOU TRY ALL KINDS OF THINGS WHEN YOU'RE YOUNG AND STUPID. *AMBITION* RULES YOU, TRUMPS *REASON.* IT'S TOO *RISKY*-- THAT'S WHAT I KNOW NOW. WOULDN'T DO IT A SECOND TIME.

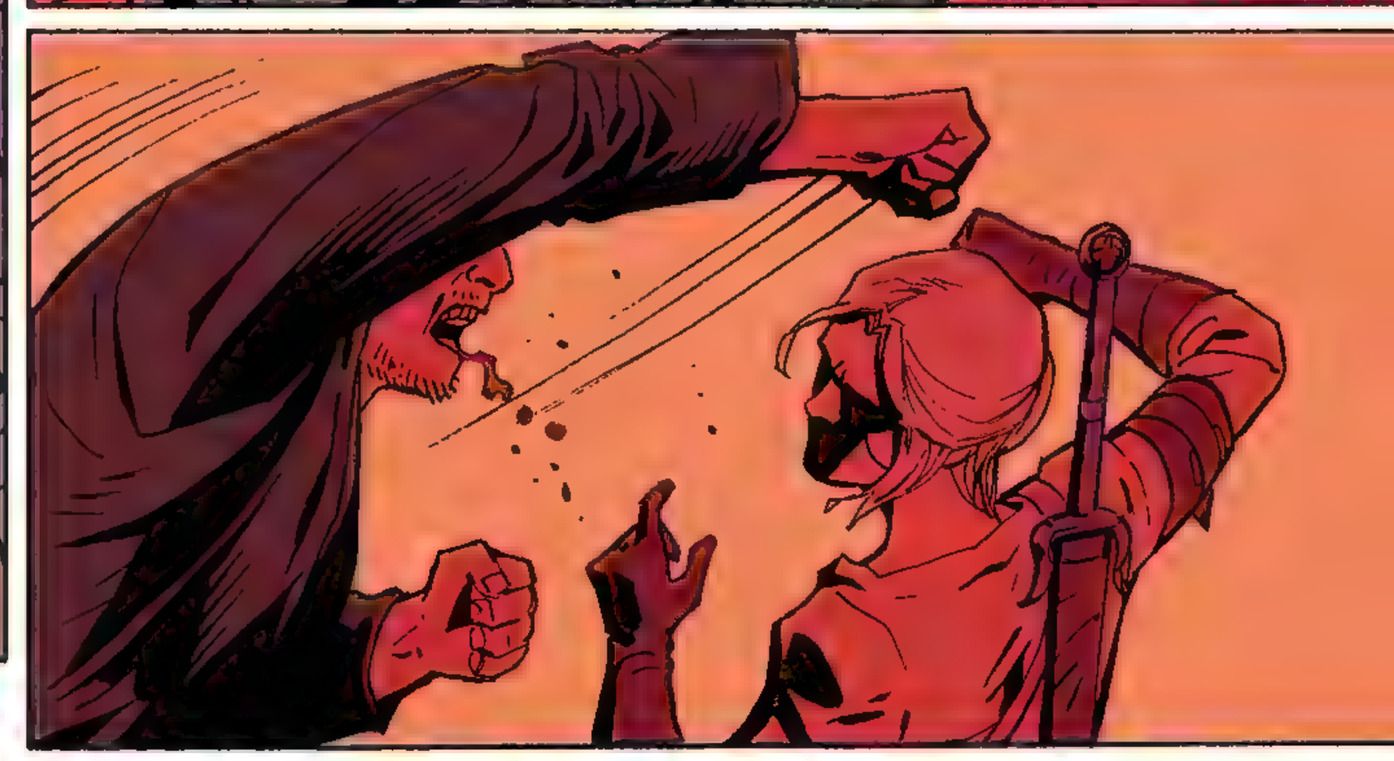
MEANIN'...YE'LL NOT TAKE THE CONTRACT?

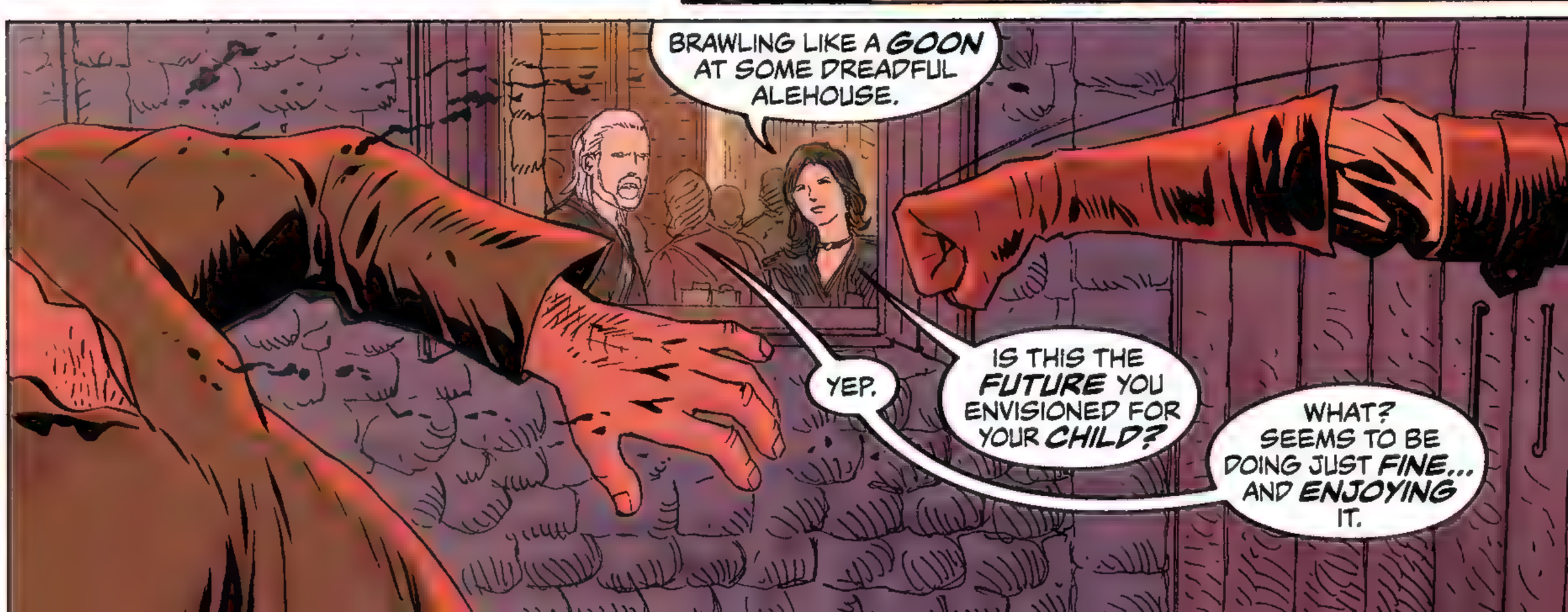
NO, WE'LL TAKE IT. JUST WON'T TRY TO LIFT THE CURSE. GOTTA KILL HER, PLAIN AND SIMPLE.

BEST BE ON OUR WAY. THANKS FOR YOUR TIME.
YES, AYE, SURE...YE NEED ANYTHIN' ELSE, YE KNOW WHERE TO FIND ME.

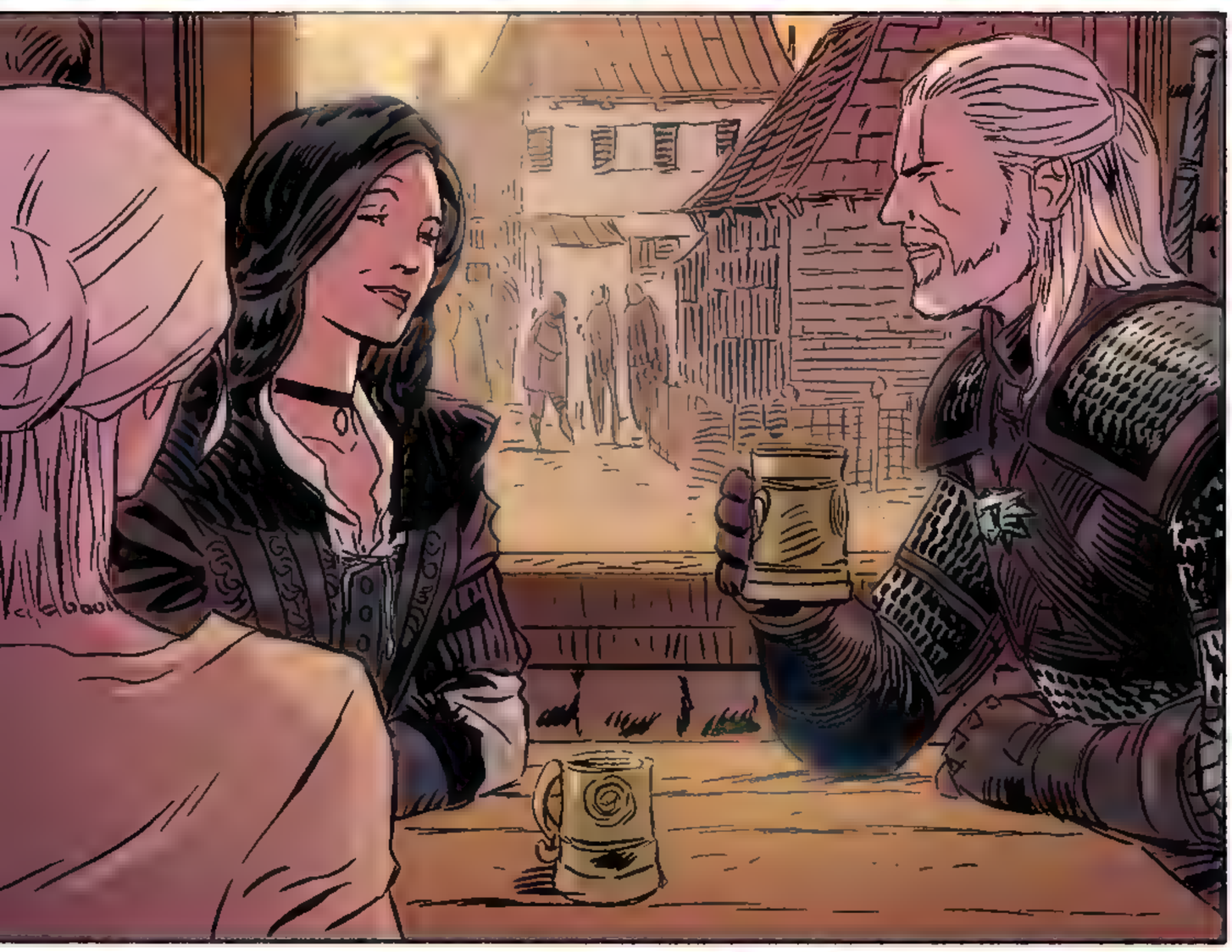


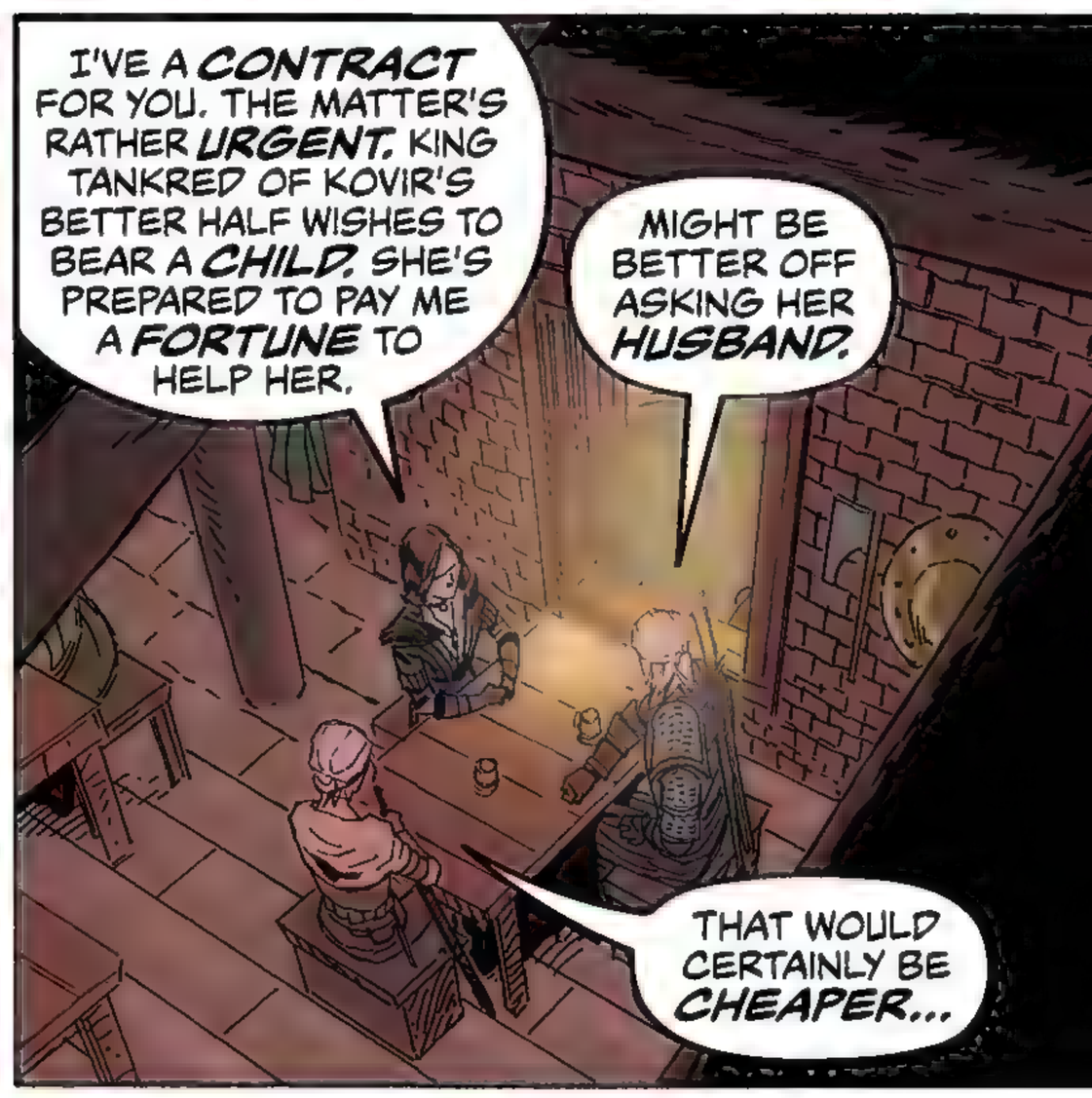
THE NEXT DAY.

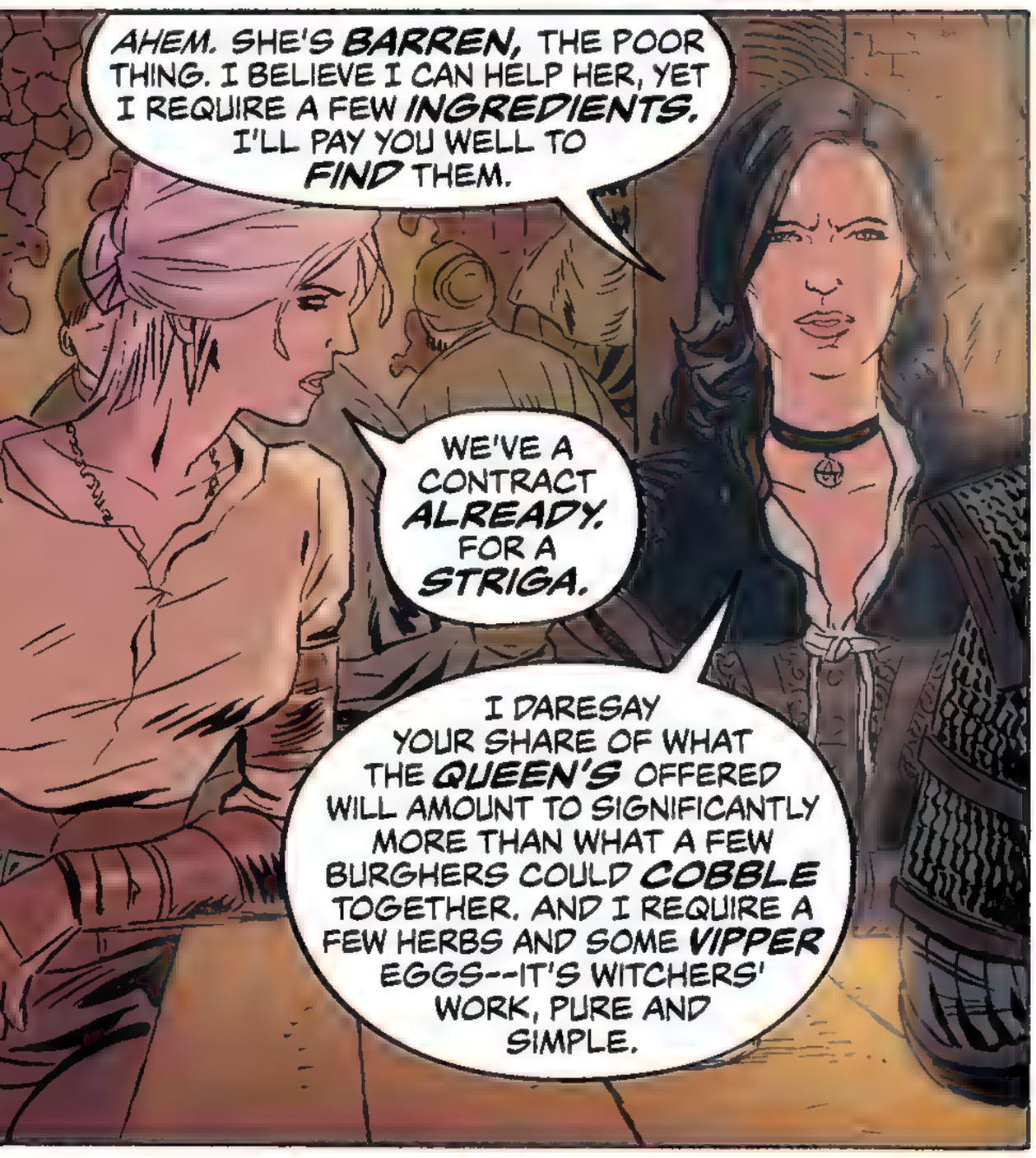


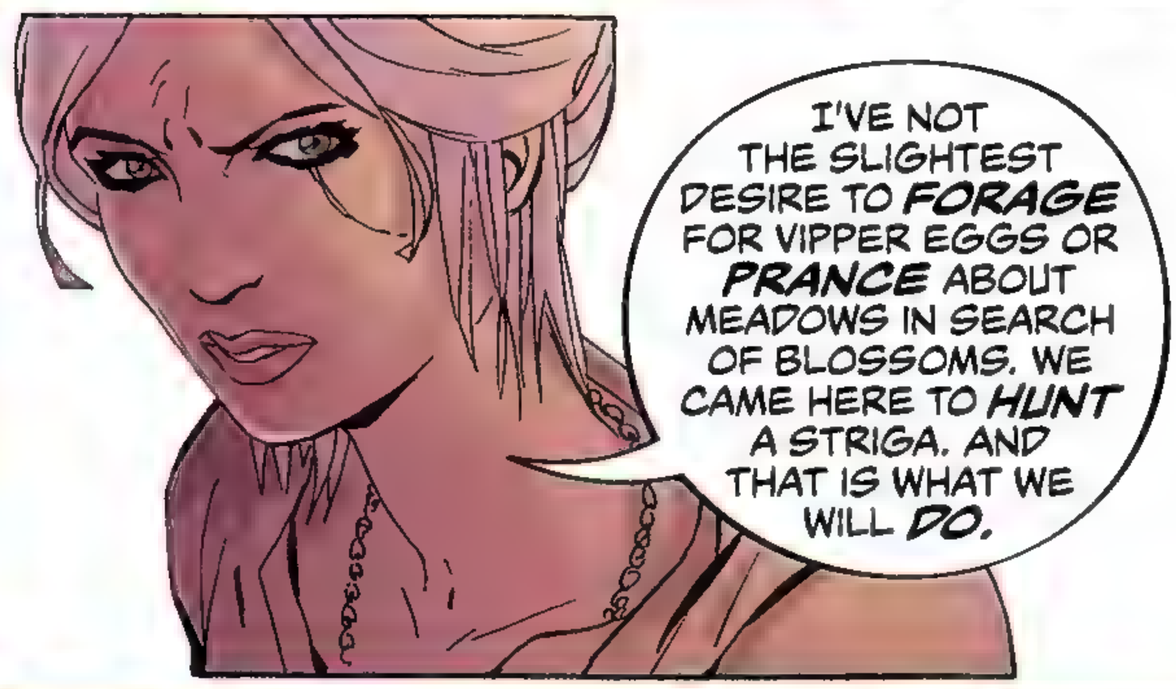

BRAWLING LIKE A GOON AT SOME DREADFUL ALEHOUSE.
YEP.
IS THIS THE FUTURE YOU ENVISIONED FOR YOUR CHILD?
WHAT? SEEMS TO BE DOING JUST FINE... AND ENJOYING IT.

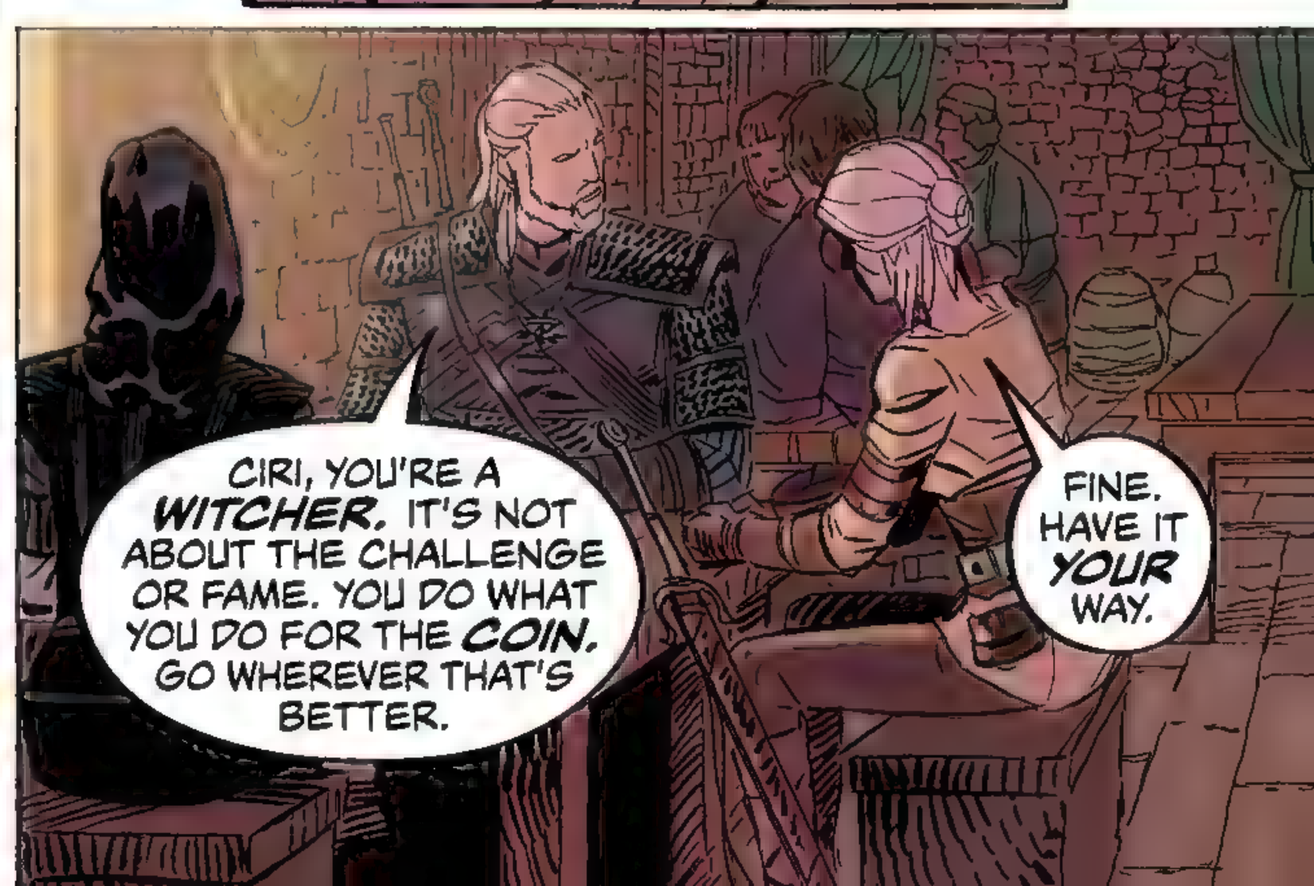
MOMENTS LATER...
BLAST. I THINK I MIGHT'VE BROKEN A FINGER.

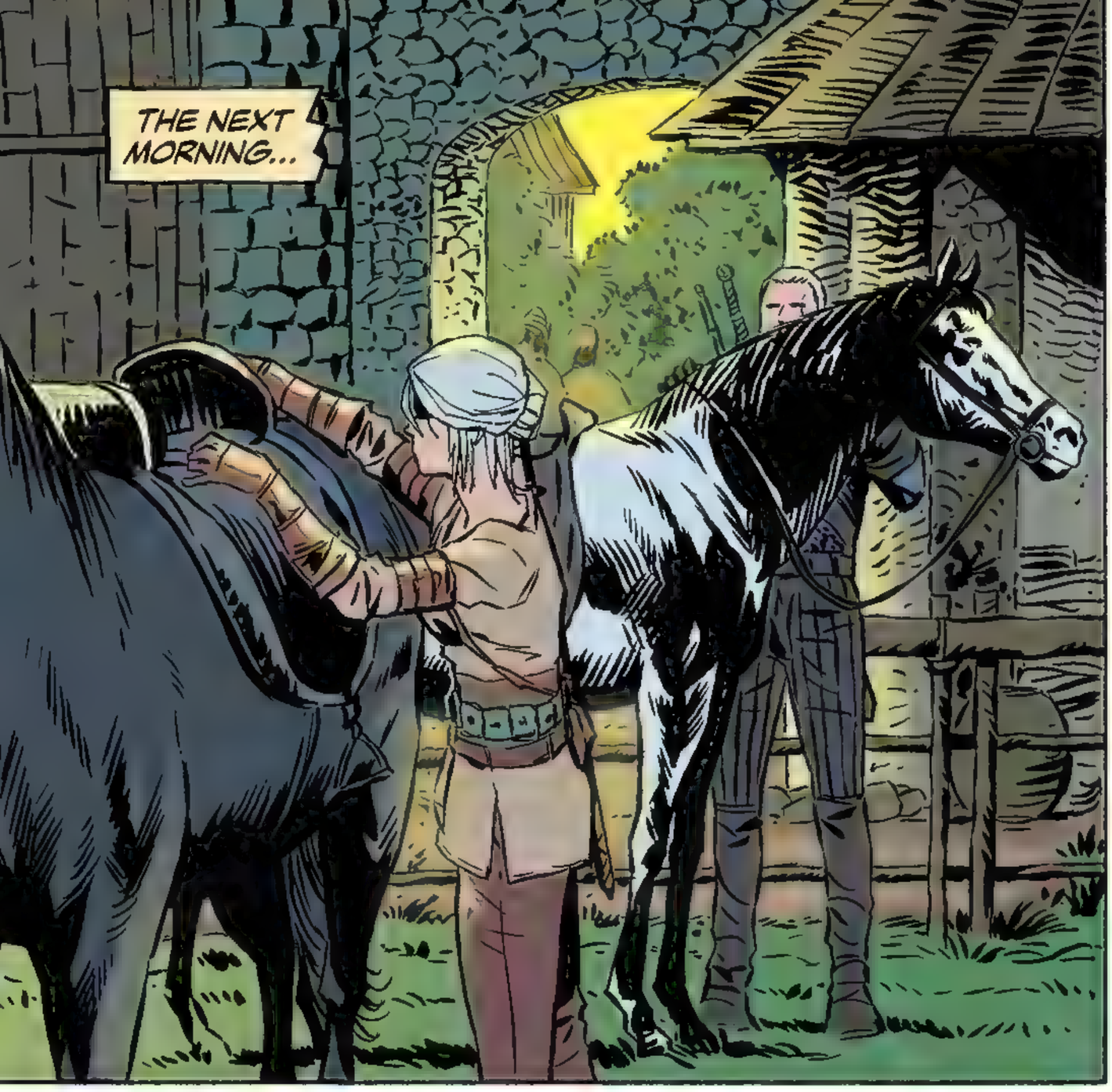


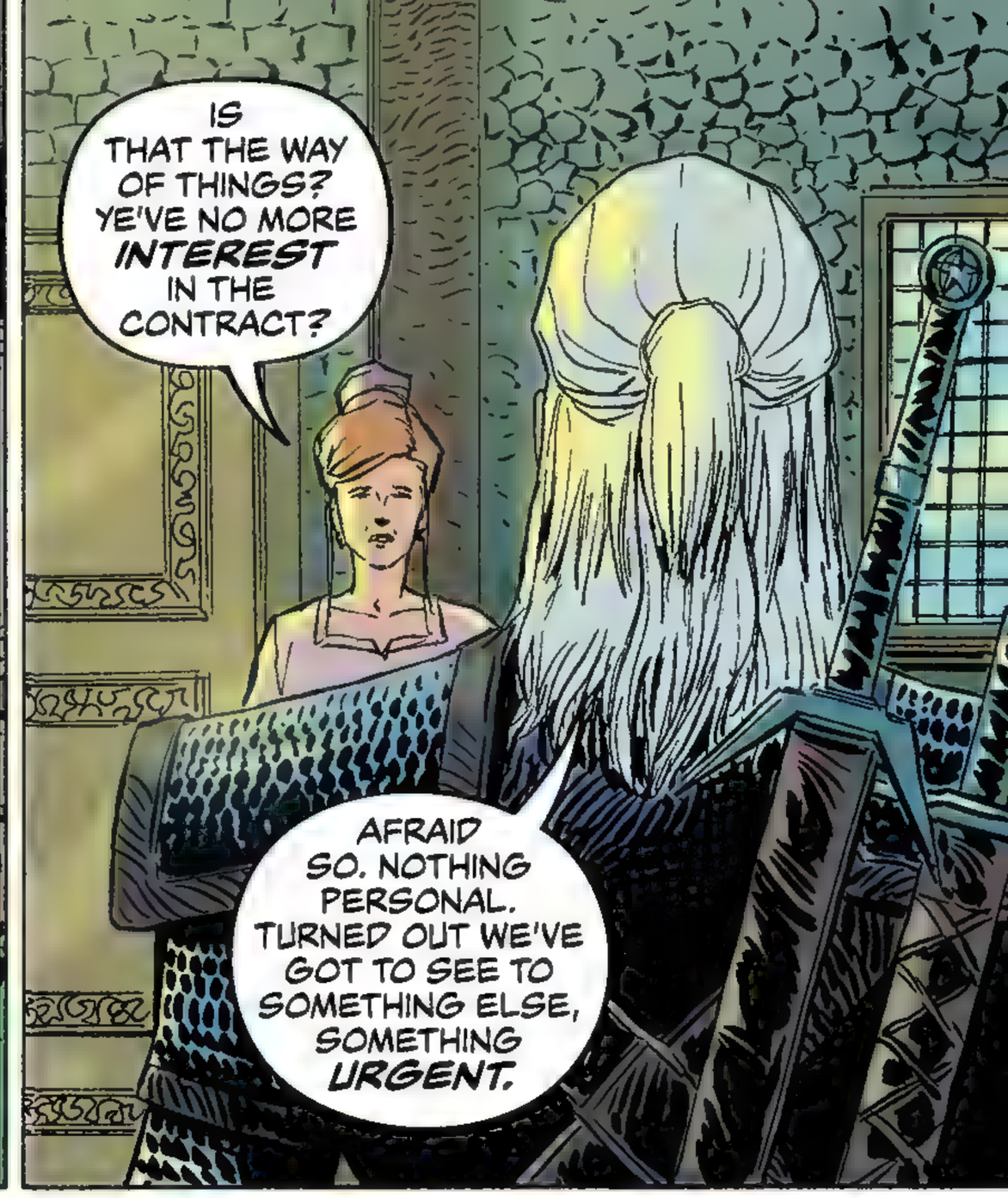

I'VE A CONTRACT FOR YOU. THE MATTER'S RATHER URGENT. KING TANKRED OF KOVIR'S BETTER HALF WISHES TO BEAR A CHILD. SHE'S PREPARED TO PAY ME A FORTUNE TO HELP HER.
MIGHT BE BETTER OFF ASKING HER HUSBAND.
THAT WOULD CERTAINLY BE CHEAPER...


AHEM. SHE'S BARREN, THE POOR THING. I BELIEVE I CAN HELP HER, YET I REQUIRE A FEW INGREDIENTS. I'LL PAY YOU WELL TO FIND THEM.
WE'VE A CONTRACT ALREADY. FOR A STRIGA.
I DARESAY YOUR SHARE OF WHAT THE QUEEN'S OFFERED WILL AMOUNT TO SIGNIFICANTLY MORE THAN WHAT A FEW BURGHERS COULD COBBLE TOGETHER. AND I REQUIRE A FEW HERBS AND SOME VIPPER EGGS--IT'S WITCHERS' WORK, PURE AND SIMPLE.

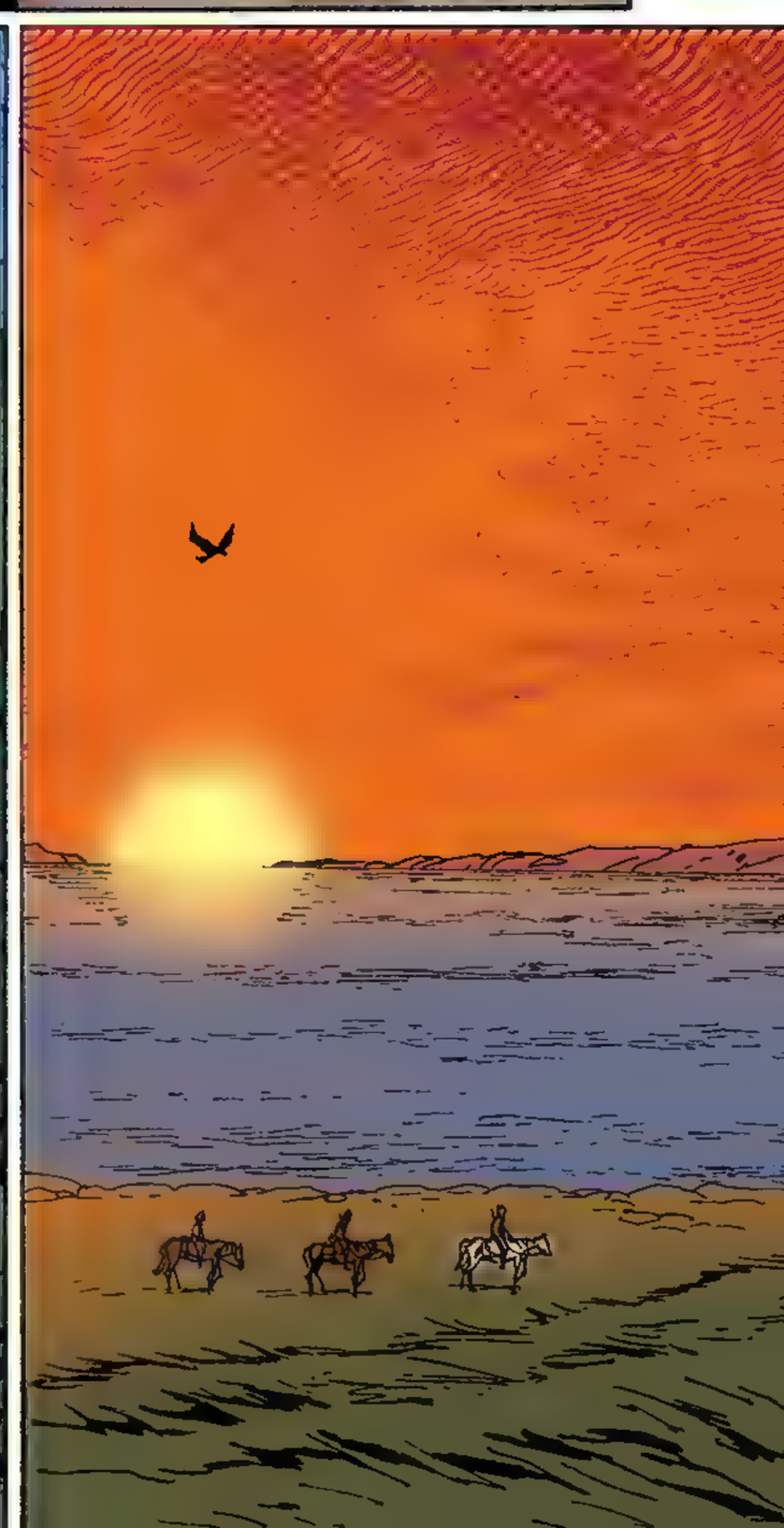

I'VE NOT THE SLIGHTEST DESIRE TO FORAGE FOR VIPPER EGGS OR PRANCE ABOUT MEADOWS IN SEARCH OF BLOSSOMS. WE CAME HERE TO HUNT A STRIGA. AND THAT IS WHAT WE WILL DO.


CIRI, YOU'RE A WITCHER. IT'S NOT ABOUT THE CHALLENGE OR FAME. YOU DO WHAT YOU DO FOR THE COIN. GO WHEREVER THAT'S BETTER.
FINE. HAVE IT YOUR WAY.


THE NEXT MORNING...


IS THAT THE WAY OF THINGS? YE'VE NO MORE INTEREST IN THE CONTRACT?
AFRAID SO. NOTHING PERSONAL. TURNED OUT WE'VE GOT TO SEE TO SOMETHING ELSE, SOMETHING URGENT.

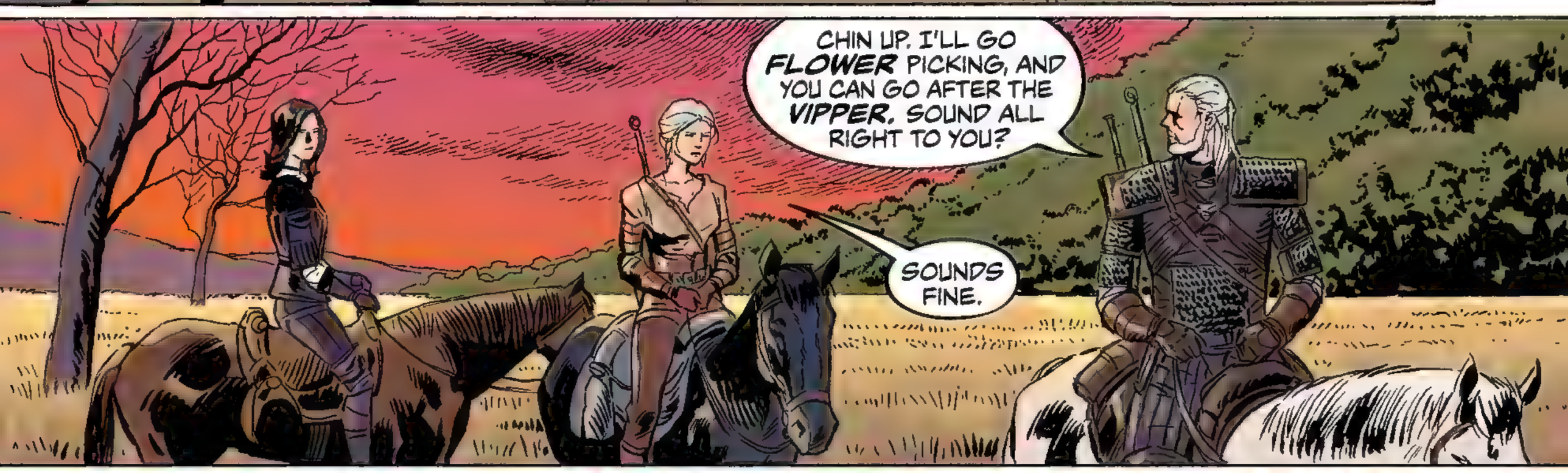
THANK YE, M'LADY, FOR EVERYTHIN'.
WHAT'S SHE SO GRATEFUL FOR?
DUNNO. BUT I'VE SEEN LOTS OF WOMEN THANK YENNEFER. NEVER KNOWN WHAT FOR, NEVER FELT THE NEED TO ASK.

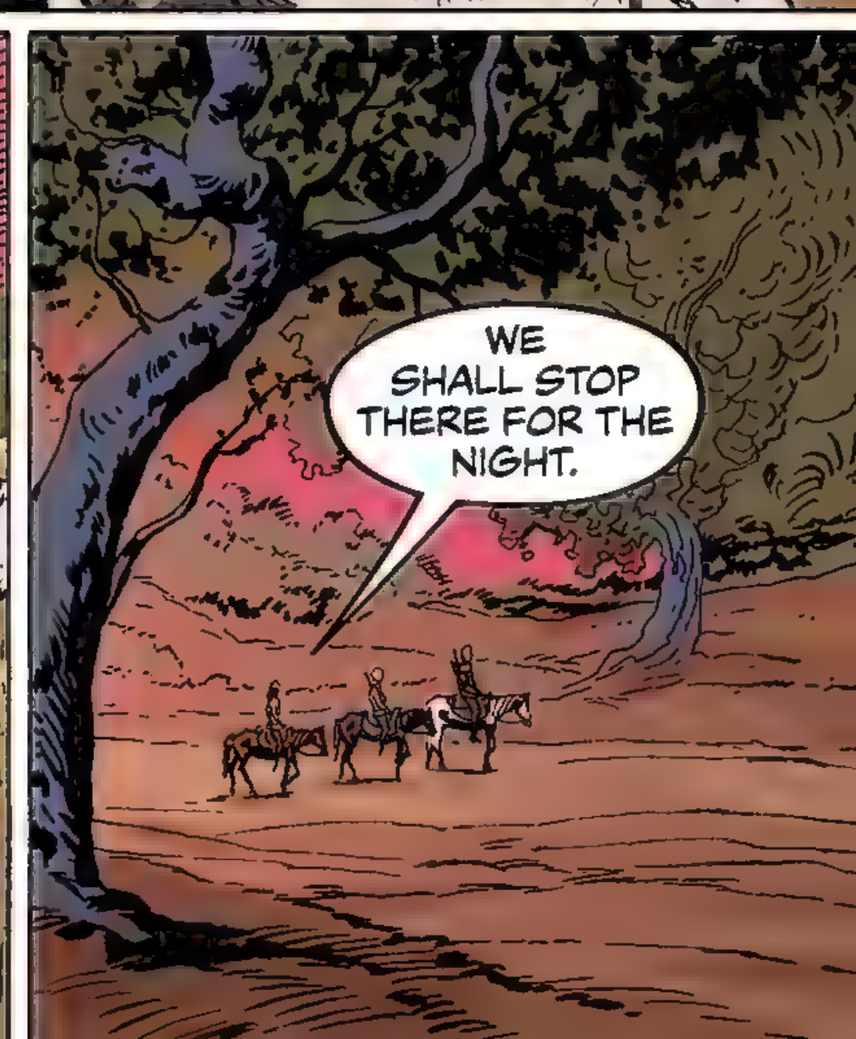


OUR WITCHERESS APPEARS TO BE OUT OF SORTS.

POUTING A BIT, I GUESS. MIGHT BE THE ONE THING THAT DISTINGUISHES HER FROM OTHER WITCHERS.

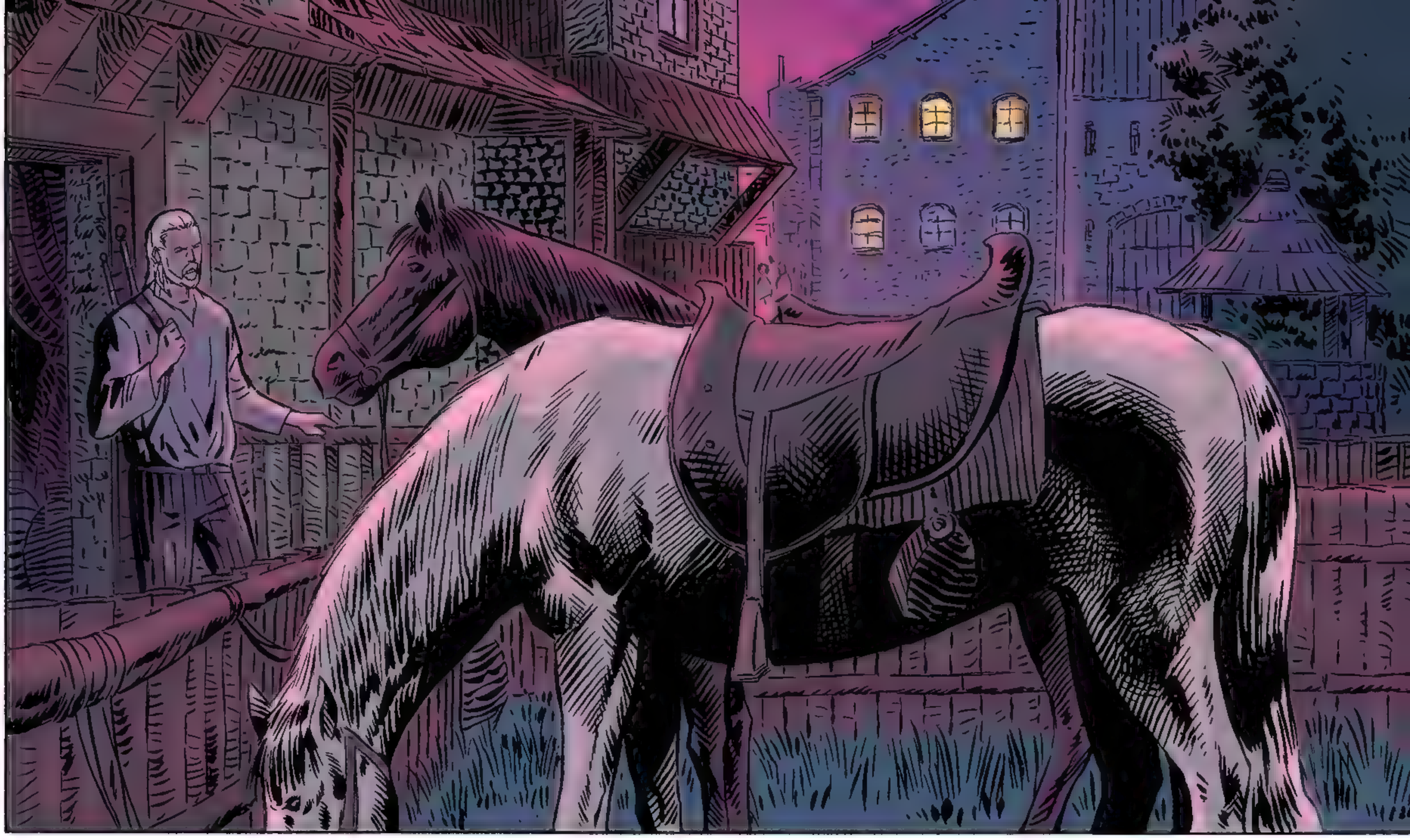
SAID THE POT ABOUT THE KETTLE. OR IS THIS ONE OF YOUR *MINDLESS JABS* AT WOMEN AND THEIR PSYCHE?

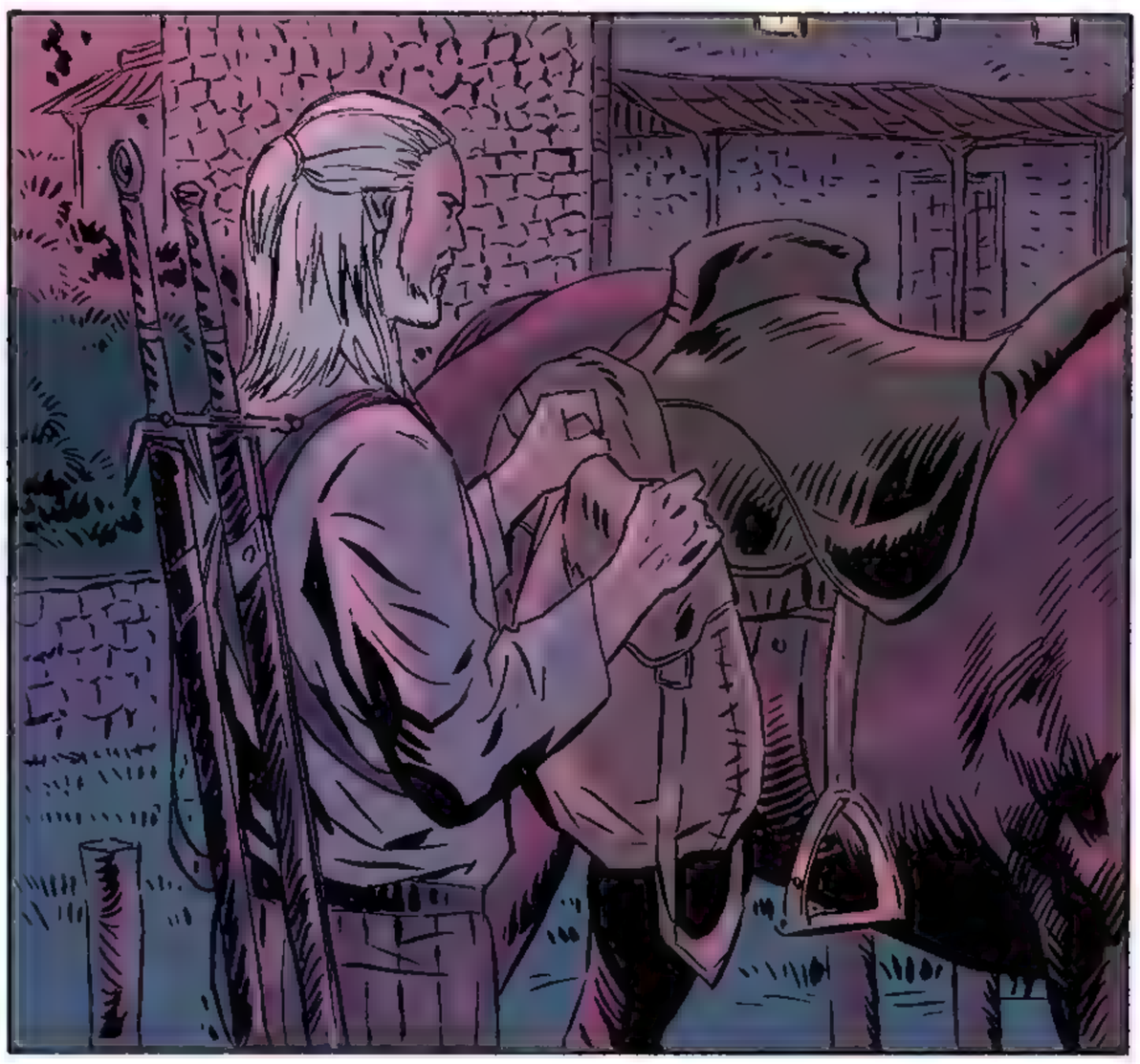




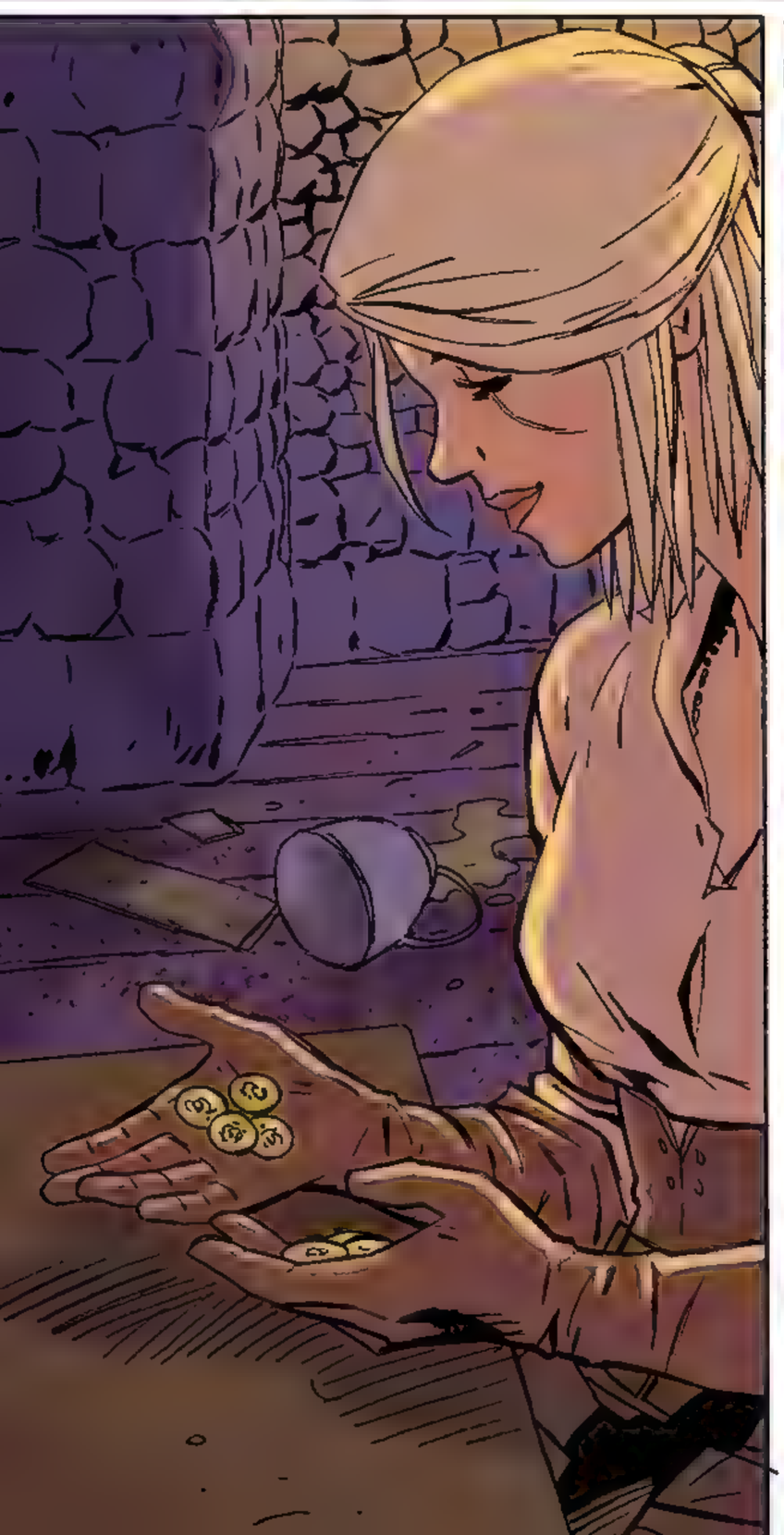
BEEN RUMMAGING THROUGH MY MIND AGAIN, I SEE.
JUST A BIT. I NEEDED TO KNOW IF YOU WOULD BE WILLING TO SCRUB MY BACK.
CAN'T SAY I FEEL STRONGLY ABOUT IT EITHER WAY.
MHM. SOAP AND SPONGE-- THERE.
THERE'S REALLY ONLY ONE THING THAT OUTDOES A HOT BATH AT THE END OF A LONG DAY OF TRAVEL.
WELL... WON'T YOU ASK WHAT IT IS? OR HAVE YOU SOMEHOW LEARNED TO FORAGE THROUGH MY THOUGHTS AS WELL?
NO. JUST SOMETHING I LEARNED A WHILE PAST AND REMEMBER. AT THE END OF A LONG DAY OF TRAVEL, A HOT BATH IS GOOD, BUT A HOT BATH AND A MUG OF CELLAR-COOLED CIDER ARE BETTER.
SPLS-SH

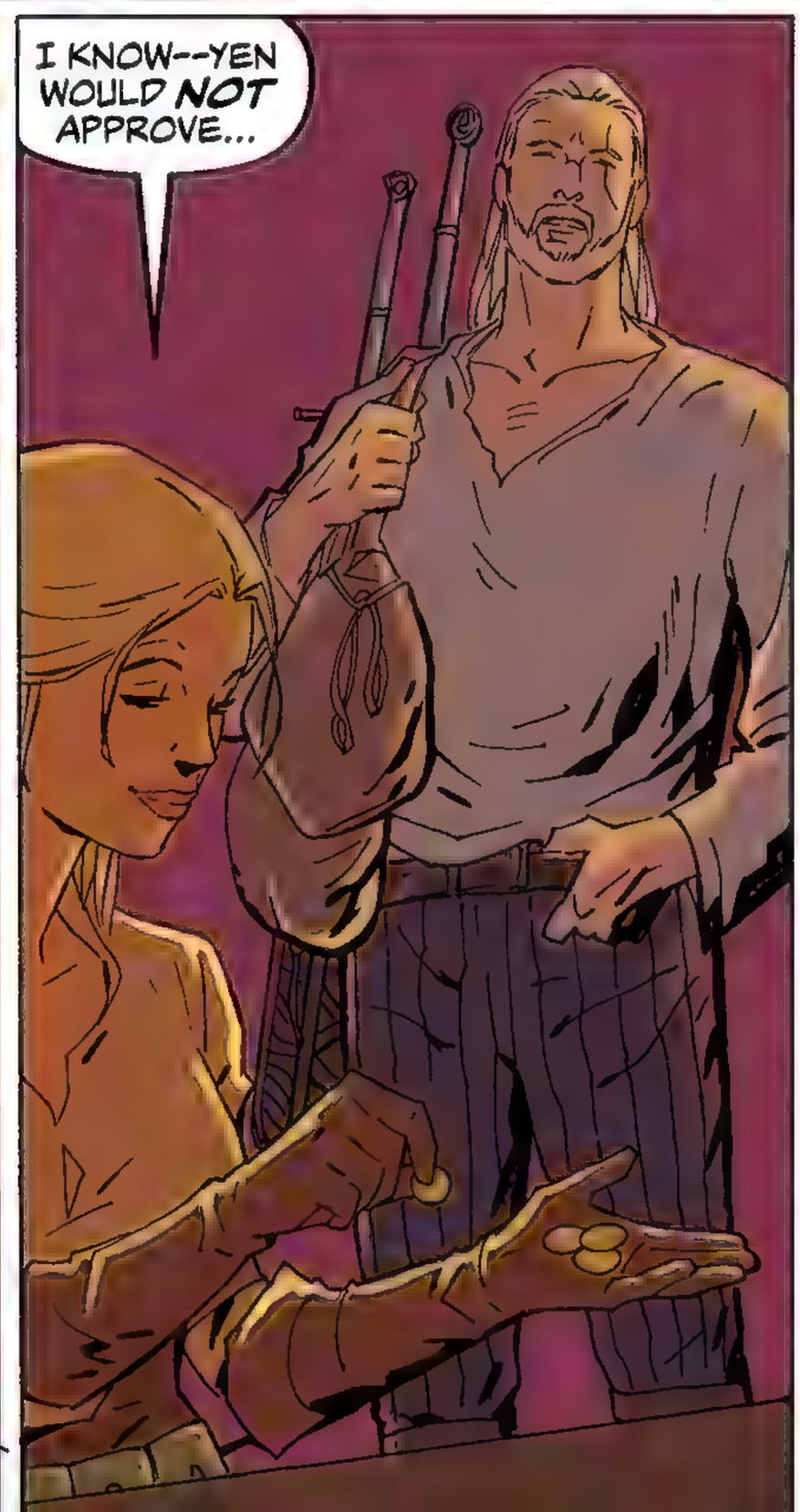
YEN WOULD NOT APPROVE...
GIMME A JUG OF COOL CIDER...
HAR HARHAR HARR!
AND WHAT WOULD YOU FANCY WITH THAT? A BIT O' BELUGA CAVIAR? THIS HERE'S AN INN AT A CROSSROADS, MATE, NOT COUNT VON ARSENSTEIN'S COURT. WE'VE HOOCH...AND NOT MUCH BESIDES.
GERALT! NOT FROM THE INNKEEP! I'VE A WINE SACK BURSTING WITH CIDER IN ONE OF MY SADDLEBAGS. FIND IT!

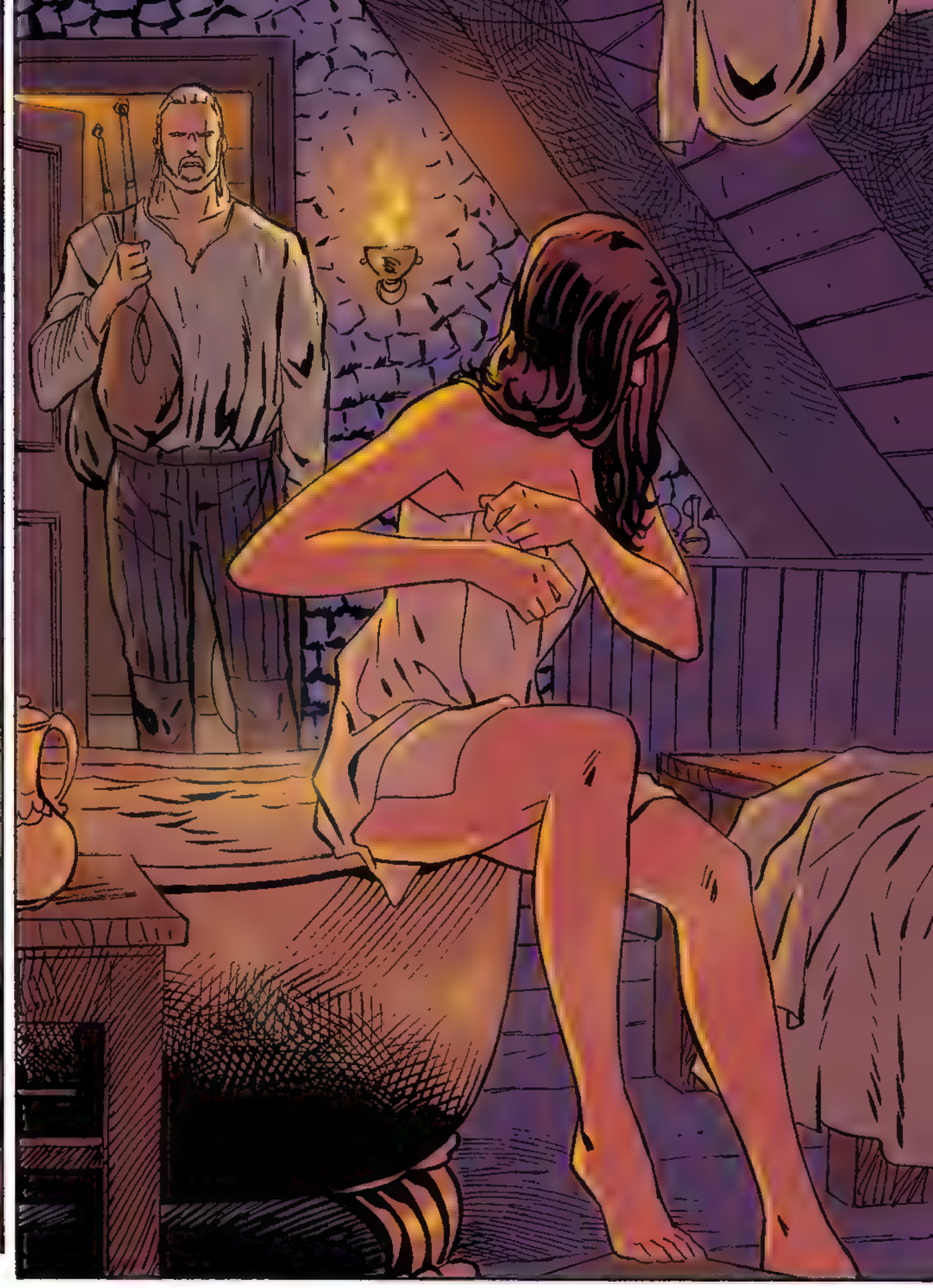


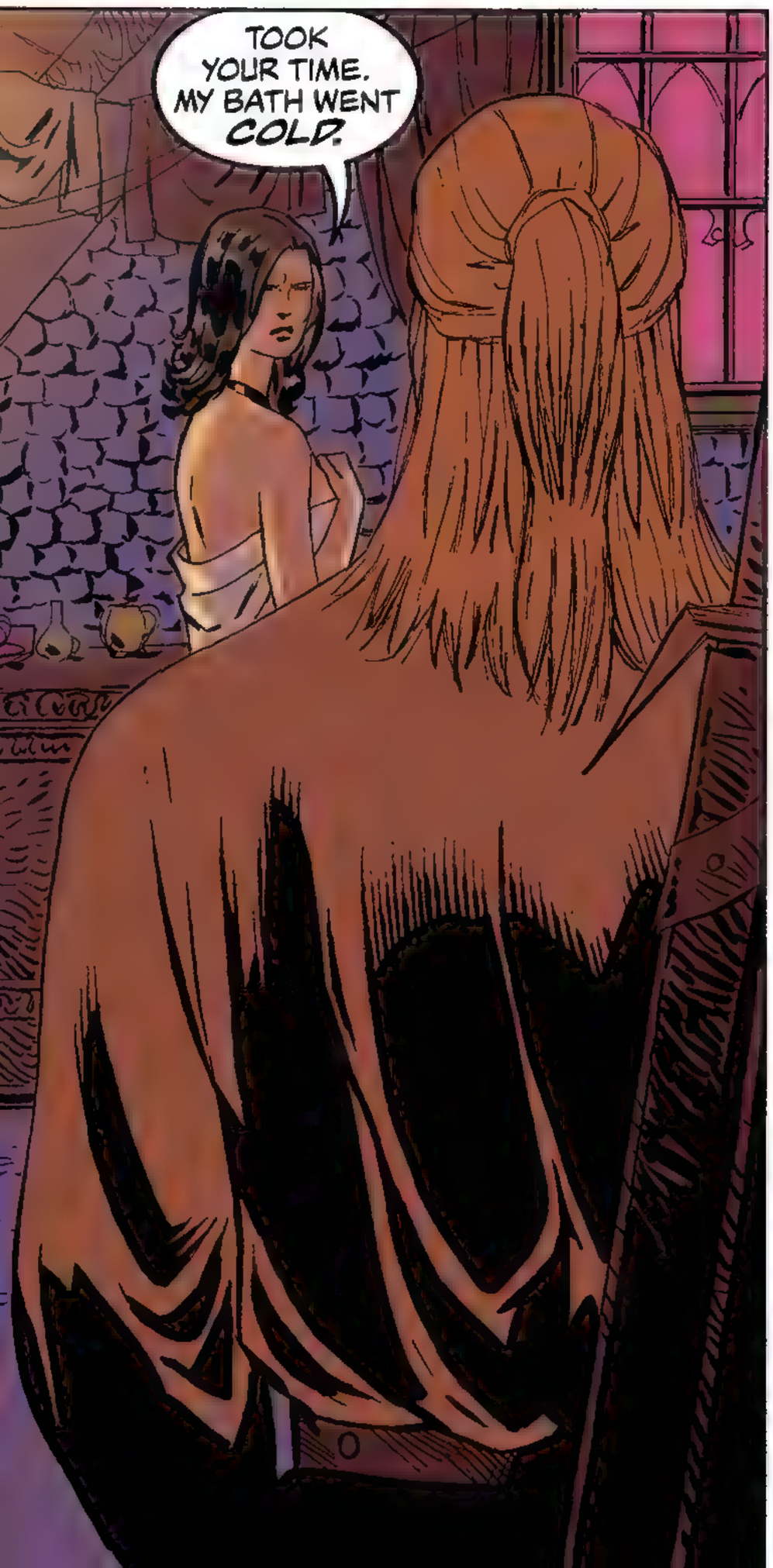


HUH...SAME BLOOMS **WE** WERE SUPPOSED TO **FIND.** THINK I GET IT NOW. BET SHE'S GOT A VIPPER EGG SOMEWHERE, TOO.




I KNOW--YEN WOULD NOT APPROVE...




TOOK YOUR TIME. MY BATH WENT COLD.

CAN'T CLAIM TO BE AN EXPERT AT THESE MATTERS, BUT...THE MIXTURE KING TANKRED'S WIFE NEEDS-- ISN'T THIS IT?
YOU WERE TO BRING ME CIDER, NOT RUMMAGE THROUGH MY SADDLE-BAGS.

DESPERATE TO KEEP CIRI AWAY FROM THE STRIGA, WEREN'T YOU? GAVE US THIS JOB TO PREVENT HER FROM FIGHTING IT.
IS THAT SO SURPRISING?
NO. JUST SURPRISED YOU COULDN'T BE STRAIGHT WITH US ABOUT IT...

WHAT *GOOD* WOULD THAT HAVE DONE? HONESTLY, IF I'D SIMPLY ASKED YOU TO LET THE STRIGA BE, TO *DROP* THE WHOLE MATTER, WOULD YOU HAVE?

POINT IS, YOU DIDN'T EVEN BOTHER *TRYING.*

PSHAW. THE POINT IS *ACTUALLY* THAT I KNOW YOU TWO EXCRUCIATINGLY WELL. YOU'D HAVE *MUTTERED* SOMETHING NONDESCRIPT, NEITHER CONFIRMING NOR DENYING MY REQUEST, WHILE CIRI LAUNCHED INTO A *TIRADE* ABOUT HOW I TREAT HER LIKE A CHILD AND HAVE NO FAITH IN HER ABILITIES.

YE'RE *ANGERED.* I'VE NOT SEEN YE ANGERED AFORE.

WHAT MAKES YOU THINK I'M ANGRY?

I CAN TELL WHEN FOLK'RE ANGERED. THE *AIR* ROUND 'EM CHANGES. TURNS THE COLOR OF THE SETTIN' SUN.

THEY WEREN'T *HONEST* WITH ME. THEY LIED. I'VE NOT GROWN UP TO THEM. THEY'VE NOT BEGUN *THINKING* OF ME THAT WAY. I'VE HAD ENOUGH.

AND YE THINK THEY WILL IF YE FLY?

NO CHANCE. BUT THE STRIGA'S *BLOODY HEAD*...I DARESAY THEY'LL STOP *FEARING* FOR MY LIFE IF I BRING THEM THAT.

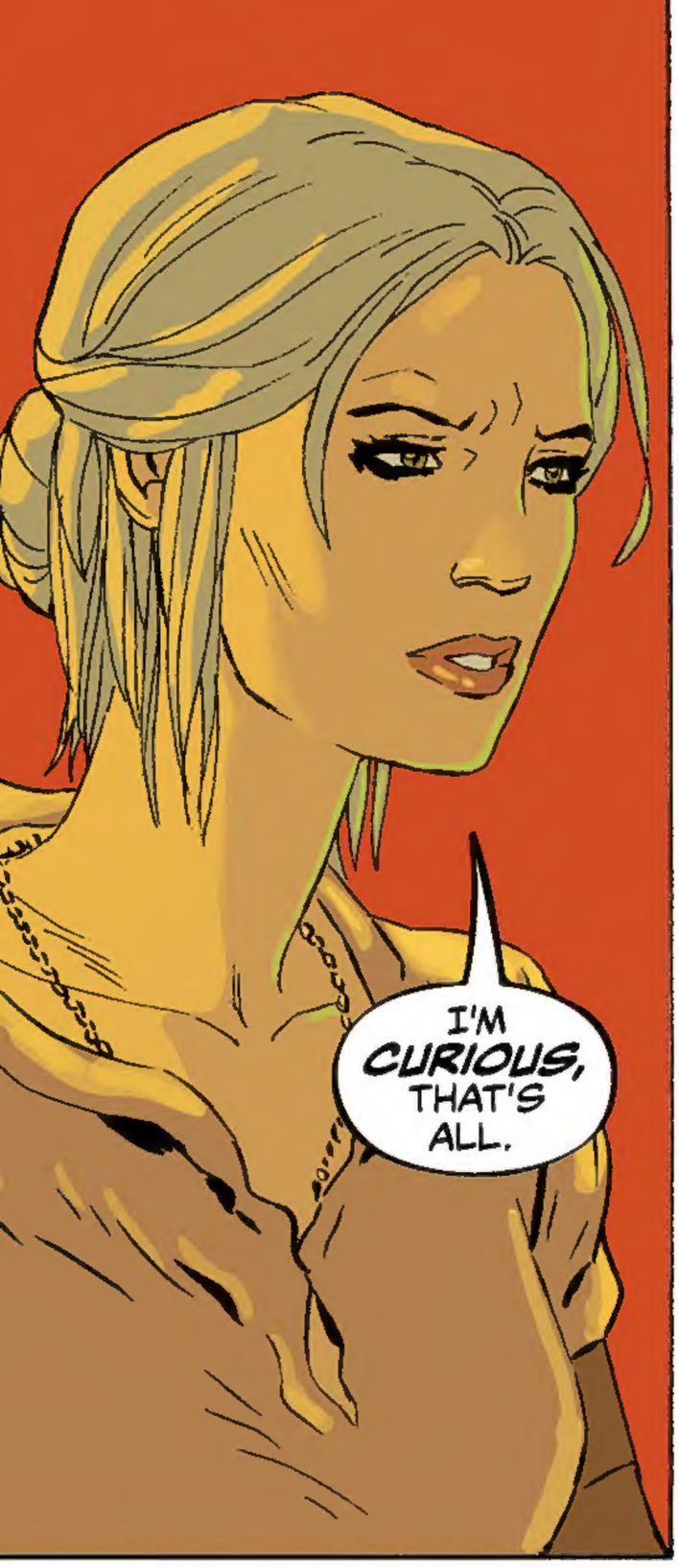
STRIGAS'RE HORRIFYIN'! YE'RE DAFT TO WANT TO HUNT IT *ALONE!*

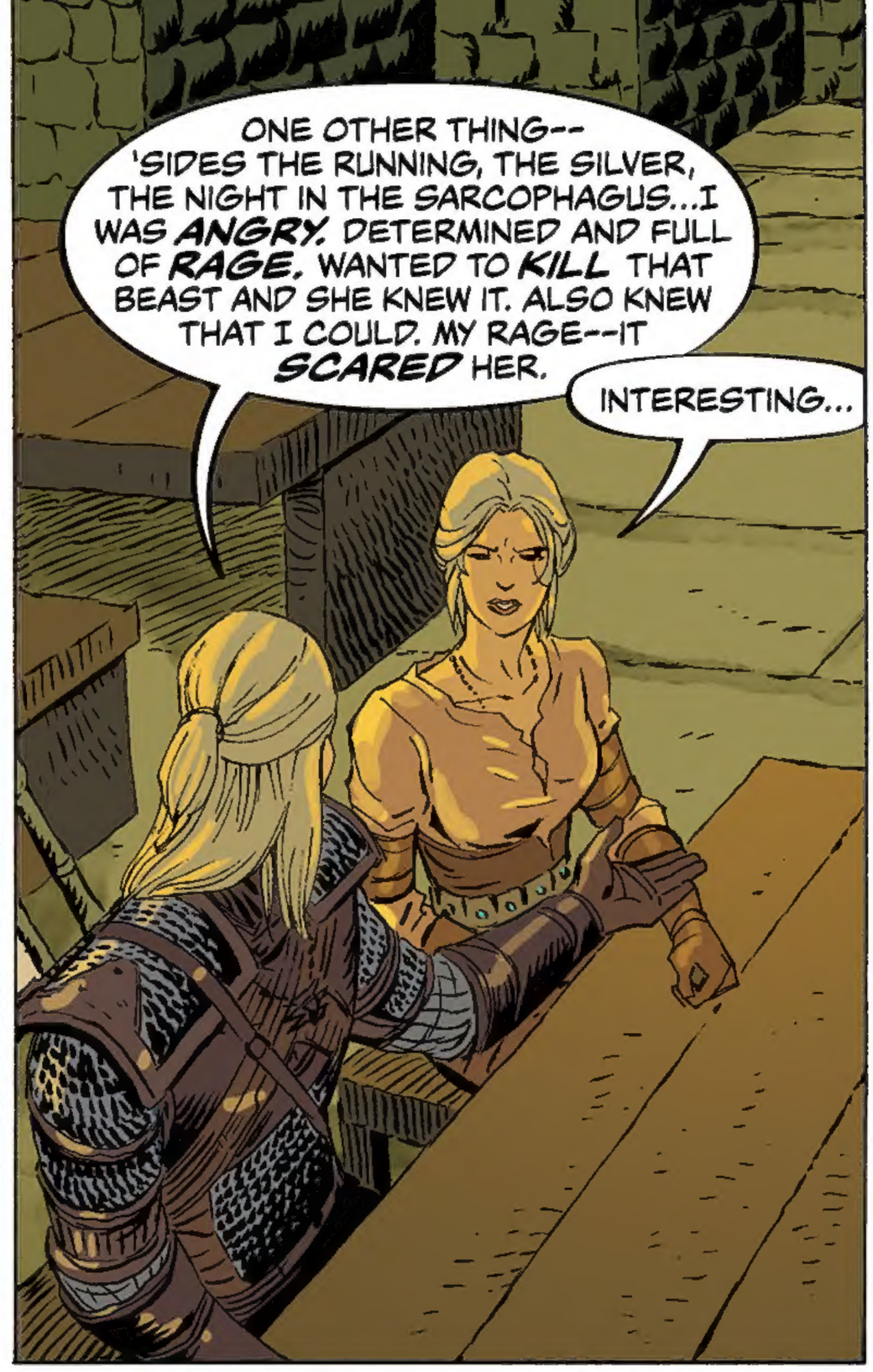
YOU CAN HAVE FRIED DUCK GIBLETS OR ROAST LAMB. AND I'VE A SORREL SOUP FOR THOSE WITH A TENDER STOMACH.
THE LAMB FOR ME. AND AN ALE.
SAME. WITH TWO ALES. NO USE PRETENDING.

THE SOUP? WHY NOT.

SO...ONCE MORE, THE STRIGA-- YOU LET IT CHASE YOU ABOUT, TIRE ITSELF OUT, YOU SMOTE IT SOME WITH YOUR SILVER, THEN LOCKED YOURSELF IN HER SARCOPHAGUS?

BROAD TERMS, SOUNDS ABOUT RIGHT. NOTHING WE NEED TO HASH OUT, THOUGH. GOT A DIFFERENT JOB NOW, NEED TO FOCUS ON THAT.


I'M CURIOUS, THAT'S ALL.

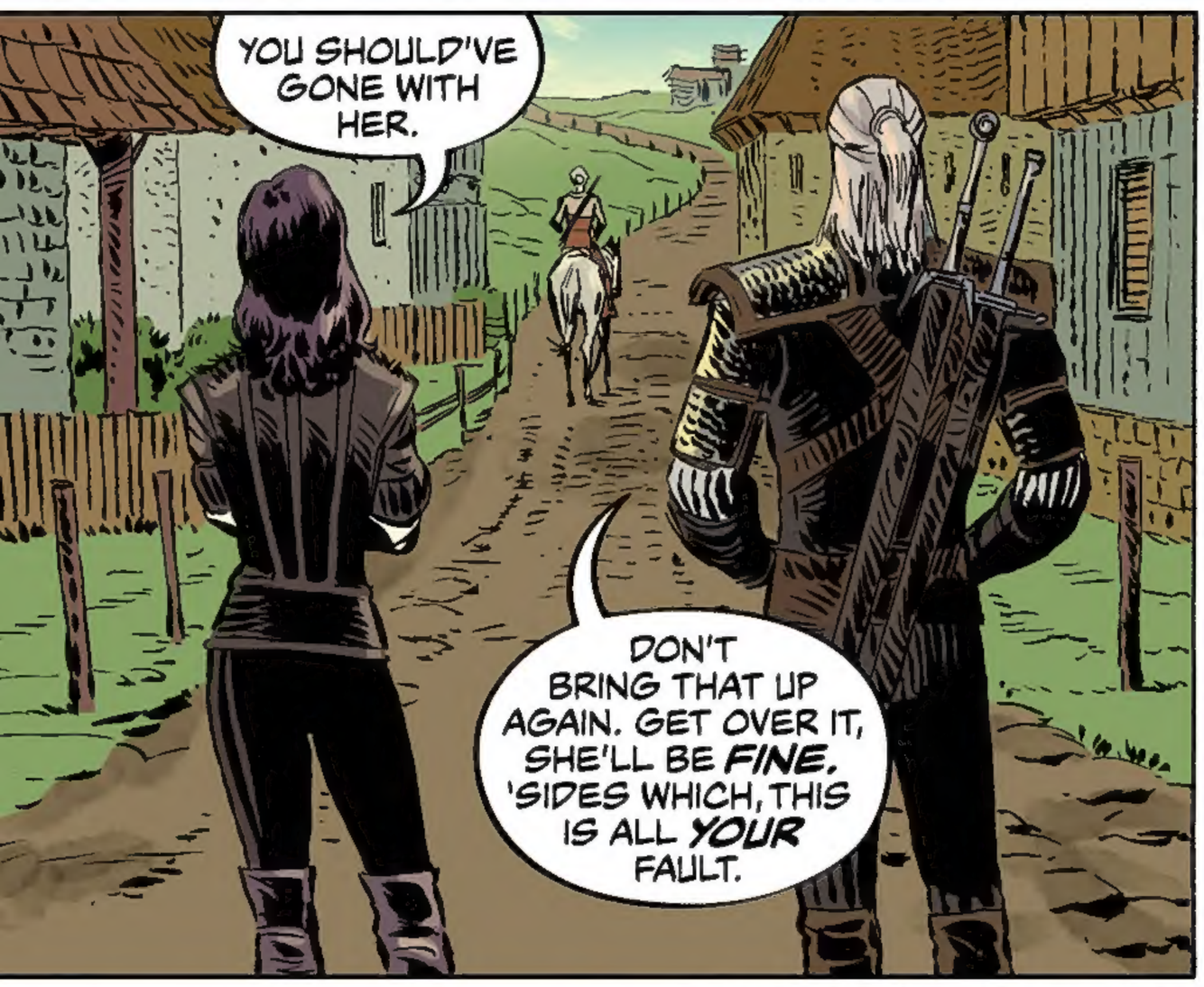

ONE OTHER THING-- 'SIDES THE RUNNING, THE SILVER, THE NIGHT IN THE SARCOPHAGUS...I WAS ANGRY. DETERMINED AND FULL OF RAGE. WANTED TO KILL THAT BEAST AND SHE KNEW IT. ALSO KNEW THAT I COULD. MY RAGE--IT SCARED HER.
INTERESTING...

HAVE WE REALLY NOTHING ELSE TO DISCUSS? AMAZINGLY, I'VE COME TO FIND STRIGAS A TIRING TOPIC.

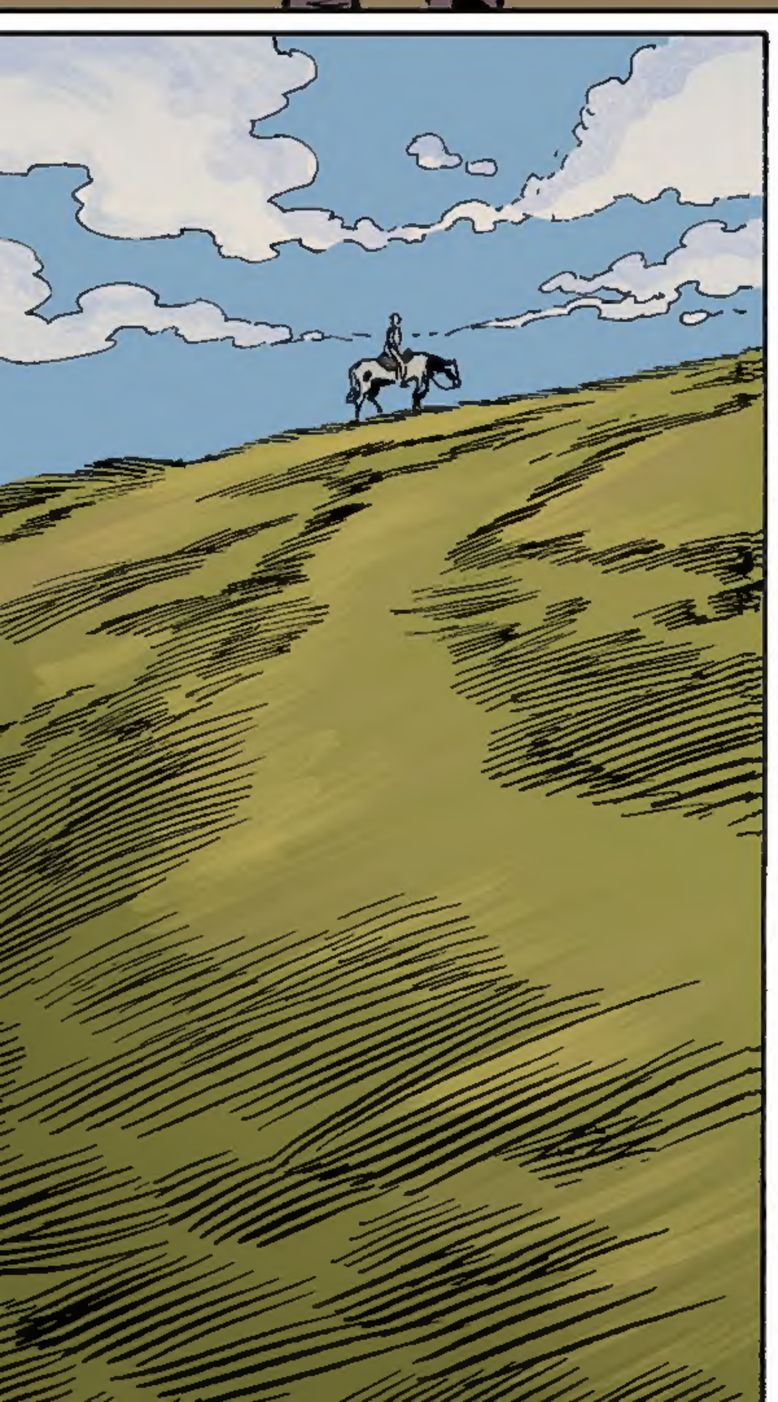
PURELY AN ILLUSION. IN POINT OF FACT, I WILL EAT THE DAMN SORREL...
...BUT IT SHALL LOOK AND TASTE LIKE CAVIAR-STUFFED GUINEA HEN WITH ORANGES.

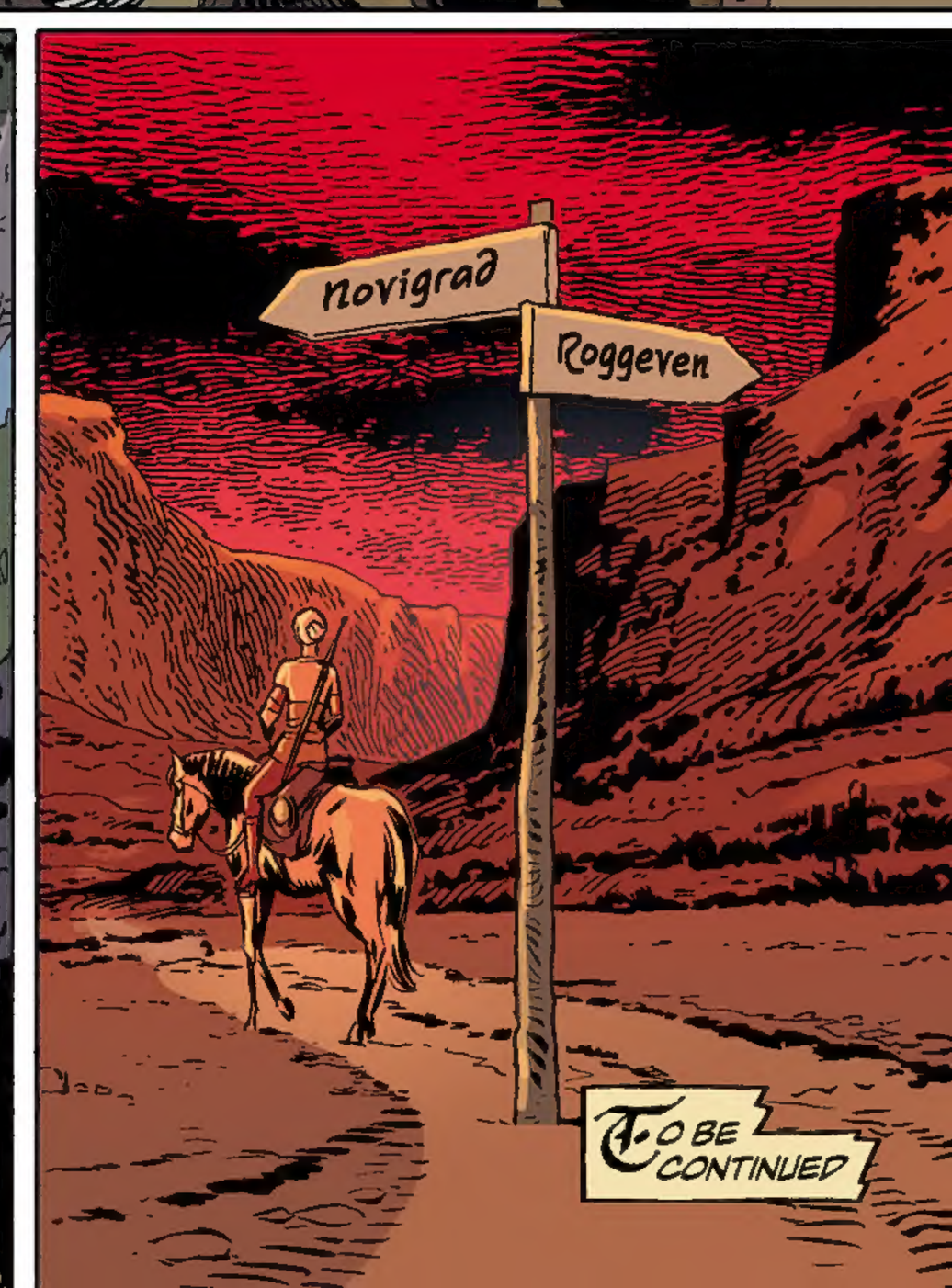
THE NEXT MORNING...
NO VIPPERS IN THE AREA, UNFORTUNATELY. THOUGH WORD HAS IT THERE'S ONE IN THE SWAMP NORTH OF HERE, NEARER TO ROGGEVEN.

GOT EVERYTHING YOU NEED?
YES, THANKS. I SHALL RETURN SOON. IN A FEW DAYS AT MOST.
PLEASE... PLEASE BE CAREFUL.


YOU SHOULD'VE GONE WITH HER.
DON'T BRING THAT UP AGAIN. GET OVER IT, SHE'LL BE FINE. 'SIDES WHICH, THIS IS ALL YOUR FAULT.

MY FAULT?
SHOULDN'T 'AVE SCHEMED. AND YOU CERTAINLY DIDN'T HAVE TO LIE.




Novigrad
Roggeven
TO BE CONTINUED

SON OF ULTRON